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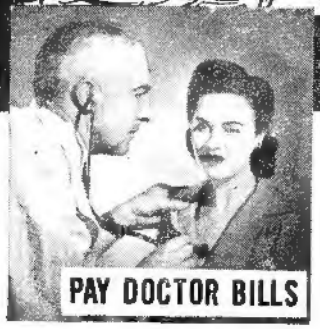

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From his dreams she came; Joan was the magnet, he the steel. But Joan was dead.

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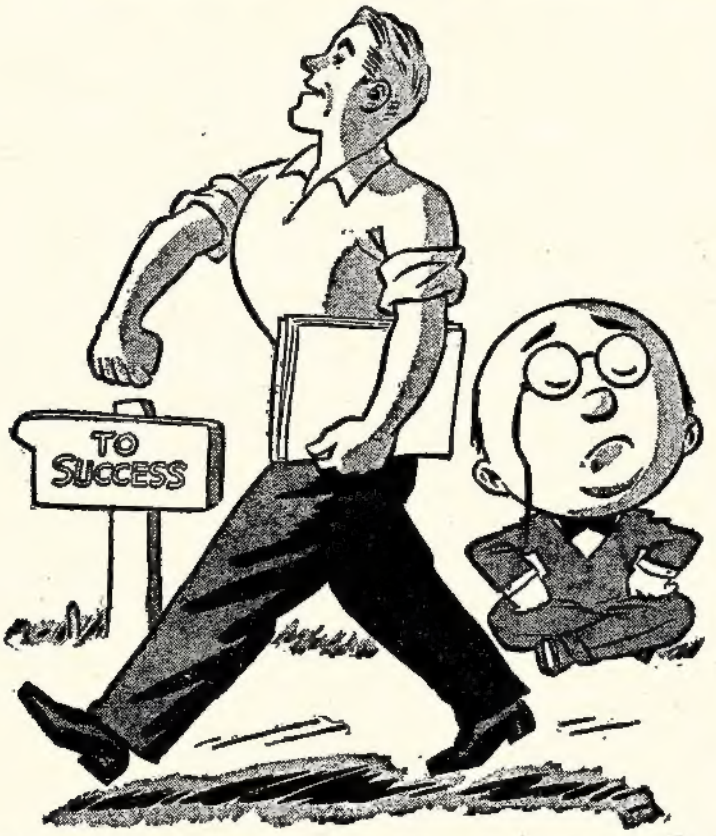
D. McILWRAITH, *Editor*

How to pass a genius



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The Editor, WEIRD TALES
9 Rockefeller Plaza, New York 20, N. Y.

The Other Side Speaks—and Most Convincingly

I have read with interest, and some amusement, the reverent letters sent by inveterate readers of H. P. Lovecraft in response to your request. However, with some misgivings and the suspicion that I shall not be very popular, I dissent from the general adulation, and admit that I do not greatly admire either the literary style of Mr. Lovecraft or the "Cthulhu Mythos." Amid the general acclamation, I feel called upon to submit my minority opinion, hoping to induce, thereby, a more critical attitude toward a seeming folk-hero of fantasy writing.

Excepting some stories, and I by no means intend a blanket indictment of all of Lovecraft's work, I think that his style is prolix, affected, turgid, and labored. It is full of obvious and ill-concealed strivings for effect —"posing," it might be called. Lovecraft apparently lacked the ability to tell a plain tale and tell it straight. He lacked the clarity and objectivity of a writer such as Ambrose Bierce, who evoked horror by a direct, clear, impeccable prose and added to its effect by a matter of fact detachment.

Not even the most enthusiastic followers of Lovecraft, in Sauk City or elsewhere, can claim for him reticence and detachment. These two qualities, in my mind, are necessary for a good "ghost story," and Lovecraft lacked both completely. He always indicated the feeling supposed to be evoked in the reader with the use of the adjectives "terrible," "horrible," etc., on every page, and his style is so difficult to follow in many cases that one is often at a loss to know what is supposed to have taken place.

As for the Mythos: A ghost story, like any other, should be creditable enough to evoke in the reader "the willing suspension of disbelief." While perhaps one does not have to believe in ghosts to write about them, although it certainly helps, the writer must be able to suspend his own disbelief to make his story ring true, and Lovecraft utterly failed in this. All of the devices such as the invention of mad Arabs and the "Necronomicon" cover an obvious lack of sincerity, and, I fear, set the indelible and undesirable mark of the hack upon much of Lovecraft's work. And, if this be true of the master, how much more so of the pupils and imitators, who have attempted to perpetuate the "Mythos." In the majority of his stories, Lovecraft utterly failed to convince me of the possible reality of his elder gods and whatnot, undersea kingdoms, and other assorted unworldly flora and fauna. I am no sceptic: I am morally certain of the possibility of preternatural invasion of man's affairs, and am not at all hesitant to say so in print. Perhaps hence derives my enjoyment of well-written ghost stories, so that I feel that your efforts in the direction of exploring the Mythos are as hollow brass and tinkling cymbals, and, frankly, pretty much a waste of print. Better concentrate on getting some authors with a discipline in grammar, a sense of balance, and a real ability to write. August Derleth has this; it is frequently wasted on imitations of Lovecraft.

I remain a loyal subscriber.

Joseph V. Wilcox
Albion, Michigan.

(Continued on page 93)

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Virgil
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Hallowe'en in a Suburb

BY H. P. LOVECRAFT

THE steeples are white in the wild moonlight,
And the trees have a silver glare;
Past the chimneys high see the vampires fly,
And the harpies of upper air,
That flutter and laugh and stare.

For the village dead to the moon outspread
Never shone in the sunset's gleam,
But grew out of the deep that the dead years keep
Where the rivers of madness stream
Down the gulfs to a pit of dream.

A chill wind weaves thro' the rows of sheaves
In the meadows that shimmer pale,
And comes to twine where the headstones shine
And the ghouls of the churchyard wail
For harvests that fly and fail.

Not a breath of the strange gray gods of change
That tore from the past its own
Can quicken this hour, when a spectral pow'r
Spreads sleep o'er the cosmic throne
And looses the vast unknown.

So here again stretch the vale and plain
That moons long-forgotten saw,
And the dead leap gay in the pallid ray,
Sprung out of the tomb's black maw
To shake all the world with awe.

And all that the morn shall greet forlorn,
The ugliness and the pest
Of rows where thick rise the stone and brick,
Shall some day be with the rest,
And brood with the shades unblest.

Then wild in the dark let the lemurs bark,
And the leprous spires ascend;
For new and old alike in the fold
Of horror and death are penn'd,
For the hounds of Time to rend.

. . . where each man could shape the thing he wanted most . . .
but where there was never a second choice.

Island of the Hands

BY MARGARET ST. CLAIR

EVER since he had begun to have the dreams about Joan, there had been a compass in his head. He felt that he could go as directly to the spot from which she was calling him as a homing pigeon returns to its cote. He woke from those dreams—dreams in which she stood before him pale and disheveled, weeping bitterly, imploring him, "Come, Oh, come,"—as surely oriented as an arrow in flight. Joan was the magnate, and he the steel. But Joan was dead.

They had hunted for her for nearly a week after her plane had crashed. Over and over the water, day after day, sectioning and resectioning the area where she must have gone down. There had never been any trace. How could there be? Garth was a water world, with its land areas confined to a few island chains where its scanty population lived. The best that could have happened was that she might have floated for a few hours, for a few days, before she drowned.

Dirk had been talking to her by rad when her plane had crashed. The flight had been going splendidly, rather monotonous really. She to see him in a few hours. And then her voice had soared up suddenly in a shocking scream, "The plane! What—Oh, my God!"

Heading by Jon Arfstrom

Seconds later he had heard the final roaring crash.

Something had happened to Joan's plane in perfect weather, with visibility unlimited, with the engines purring silkenly. What? What had caused the crash?

Not long after the search for his wife was officially abandoned, Dirk began to have the dreams. Night after night with the compass in his brain pointing, nearly three months of nights, until he began to wonder whether grief for Joan—too soon lost, too well loved—was breaching the wall of sanity in him. And then his decision, no sooner reached than rejoiced in, the decision to abandon rationality and go to look for a woman who was certainly dead.

Dirk Huygens went to Larthi, the little settlement from which the official rescue planes had set out. He could pilot a plane himself, but in Larthi he hired a quadriga with two navigators to spell each other. He did not want the duties of piloting to distract him from the pointing of the needle in his head.

Sokeman was the name of the chief navigator, a lean nervous man who smoked and coughed continually. Ross, the second pilot, was of very different physical type—bull-necked and broad-shouldered, with a ready grin. They had good references.

"What were those coordinates again?" Sokeman asked suddenly. The three men were having a drink together in a waterfront bar in Larthi to bind the bargain they had made.

"63° 11′ west, 103° 01′ north,' Huygens said. Or thereabouts. As I told you, I can't be quite sure. I want the whole area searched."

"Um." Sokeman ordered another round of drinks.

"Why?" Huygens asked. He swallowed. "Is it—did you ever hear of land there?" Hope had begun a thin hammering in him.

"Land? Oh, no. Nothing out there but water. But it seems to me I've heard those coordinates before. Do you remember, Ross? Wasn't there a man a year or so ago asking about them?"

"I think so," Ross answered. "And a dame six months or so before that. A good looker." He grinned.

"What happened to them?" Huygens asked absently. The two pilots had told him it was too late to begin the search tonight.

Sokeman shrugged. "Don't know," he answered. "Maybe they hired boats. They didn't hire our rig."

THE next day at dawn the search began. Hour after hour the quadriga beat back and forth across the water. Huygens, his hands pressed to his head, muttered directions. "To the west. Now, back. West again. South-south west. Steady as she goes. North. North through east. Back. . . ." And hour after hour the quadriga obeyed him, hunting patiently, tirelessly, fruitlessly.

The day passed in a dazzle of empty waters. Then it was dark and time to go back to Larthi. So it was that day and the next day and the next and the next. Huygens saw that even the pilots, though they were being paid for the time spent in hunting, were growing impatient at the futility of their task.

On the fifth day he turned abruptly to Sokeman, who was piloting. "Go back," he ordered harshly. "Back to Larthi. It's no use."

Sokeman bit his lip. His eyes narrowed. Huygens thought he must be considering where he and the rig could claim to have earned a full day's pay. "It's almost sunset," he said. "Only an hour or two more. Let's finish out the day, eh, Mr. Huygens? Then we'll go back."

"All right," Huygens said unemotionally. He sank back in his seat, his hands pressed over his eyes. Hope had made him sick. A thousand times in the last few days, it seemed to him, the voice in his brain had said "Here!" imperatively. And there had never been anything but the flat surface of the empty sea.

The quadriga wheeled and banked. Sokeman sent it back and forth in long sweeps above the water. Huygens endured the ship's motion impatiently. Now that he had come to a decision, he wanted to get it over with. He wanted to be back in the rooming house in Larthi, done with hope, getting ready to go back to Zavir. There was work waiting for him in the city. It would help him to forget.

The ship shook abruptly from stem to

stern. Huygens had a sudden amazed conviction that it had rammed an invisible wall. Sokeman screamed shrilly, like a woman. It was as if a crushing weight pushed the quadriga down irresistibly toward the surface of the sea. Huygens heard a wild roaring in his ears. And then it was all black.

HUYGENS came back to consciousness to find he was vomiting. He levered himself up with one arm and looked around the quadriga's cabin. Sokeman was lying back in the pilot's seat, a huge lump swelling on his temple where it had struck against the side of the ship. Ross was stretched out in the aisle, but as Huygens watched he stirred and raised his head. The quadriga's stout frame was buckled and pleated and crumpled in a hundred places. The ship must be completely wrecked.

Ross groaned. He sat up, holding on to the back of the pilot's seat. "Where are we?" he asked. "What happened to the ship?"

"I don't know," Huygens answered. Shakily he made his way to one of the ports and looked out. "We're on a little beach," he reported. "It's rocky and steep. I can't see much. There're trees and brush on three sides of us."

"It's land, anyway," Ross answered. He looked at Sokeman and whistled. Carefully he felt over the unconscious man's skull. "I don't think he's hurt bad," he said after a minute. "Anyhow, there's nothing we can do for him. Let's go outside and see what we can find."

The quadriga seemed to have crashed in a little cove. A dark mass of heavily-foliaged trees and brush came down almost to the edge of the water. "I don't think we can get through that," Huygens said, studying it. "Let's walk along the beach and see if we can find a trail."

They had gone crunching over the pebbles for perhaps a quarter of a mile when Ross said, "This is a funny place. Notice how misty the air is, and cold and still? It was a fine bright day, a little windy, when the ship crashed. And notice those trees. I never saw trees like that before, such a dark green, with little needles making up big fat leaves."

Huygens nodded. "I thought at first they were pseudoconifers," he said, "but—what's that at the edge of the water up ahead?"

The two men exchanged glances. "A motor boat," Ross said slowly. "There must be people here. A motor boat."

A little farther along they saw a cabin cruiser, drawn up carelessly on the shingle, and then another smaller boat. They might have been there a long time. A little beyond the last craft there was an opening in the heavy blackish brush. Overgrown as it was, it seemed to be a trail which led inward.

"Those motorboats are as queer as everything about this place," Ross said as the two men started back to the quadriga after Sokeman. "What are they doing here, so far from the nearest port? It reminds me of something. . . ." He fell into a frowning abstraction.

Sokeman was standing outside the quadriga when they got back, though he looked white and sick. Huygens went into the ship for the aid kit, blankets, and other supplies. Then they started along the beach again, supporting Sokeman between them.

The trail was badly overgrown, and they had to stop frequently for Sokeman to rest. It was nearly dark when Ross said, "There's something off to the right, where the trees are sort of mashed down. Do you see it? Looks like it might be a wrecked plane."

THEY got up to it, and Ross was right. It was a wrecked plane, thoroughly wrecked. Huygens read the name on the fuselage—"Coma Berenices"—twice before he admitted to himself whose plane it was. "Coma Berenices' had been the name of Joan's plane.

He said something to the others. He dropped Sokeman's arm and ran crazily around the plane, looking for Joan. He found her under a bush to one side. She had been lying there for about three months, but there were things that made the identification unmistakable—a bracelet he had given her, her long bright hair, her wedding ring.

"Was that what you were . . . looking for?" Ross asked when he had gone back to where they were waiting for him.

"Yes," Huygens answered carefully. "It wasn't—quite what I wanted to find."

He took one of the blankets and spread

it carefully over Joan. Ross said, "We'll come back tomorrow and, and fix things up." Huygens made no answer.

They went a good deal farther on before they made camp. Huygens, when he did sleep, slept soddenly. He did not dream. There was no reason for him to. Joan was dead.

Huygens woke early the next morning, before there was much light in the sky. Little streamers of mist floated in the still, heavy air. Sokeman and Ross were still asleep.

He was thirsty. They had found a tiny spring last night, welling up softly under a clump of blackish brush. He went over to the spring, scooped up the cold water in his hand, and began to drink.

He was just rising to his feet when he saw Joan coming toward him through the trees.

He ran toward her, his heart hammering insanely. When he was about ten feet from her he stopped suddenly, as if the impulse which had borne him on was exhausted. Foreknowledge was already in him. He could see, now, that the woman was not Joan; in a sense he had known that she was not Joan when he began to run. But this moment of realization was more cruel than any yet had been.

She was not Joan. She differed from her in a hundred, a thousand, tiny ways. Her face was a more perfect oval than Joan's, her hair brighter, her eyes hazel instead of gray. She was taller than Joan, and under her thin golden tunic her body was rounder and more lithe. She walked with a more deliberate grace than Joan had. But for all the differences the resemblance was uncanny, astonishing, incredible. Huygens stared at her, and belief and disbelief alternated in him like systole and diastole in the beating of the heart.

The woman smiled at him and held out her hands in welcome. "Hello, Dirk," she said.

"Are—you're not Joan."

"No."

After a minute Huygens said, "How did you know my name?"

She smiled at him again, but did not answer. A tatter of mist floated between them. Huygens would not have been surprised if she had dissolved in it. But when the mist cleared she was still there.

The sound of their voices had wakened the other two men. Ross came up, looking about alertly. When he saw the woman, he whistled softly. "Introduce me to your friend," he said in Huygens' ear.

"What's your name?" Huygens said to Joan-not-Joan.

He would have sworn the question was new to her. She looked troubled and disturbed. "Miranda," she answered, as if after thought.

Sokeman had been looking at the girl in silence, frowning. Now he said, "Our plane was wrecked. What's the name of this place?"

"This is the place of shaping. Its name is the Island of the Hands."

Sokeman's face remained blank, but Ross let out his low whistle again. He said stumblingly, "I think, I seem to remember, I believe I've heard. . . ."

"Maybe," Miranda answered distantly. "The island is known to some people on Garth."

Ross's self-assurance was coming back. "Look here, Miranda," he said, "aren't there other people on the island? You know, people. A settlement, a town."

"Yes, there are people," Miranda replied. She had a low, musical voice, sweeter than Joan's had been. She moved closer to Dirk, smiling, and fingered the stuff of his sleeve. He saw that she was very beautiful. Without looking at Ross she said, "Shall I take you to them?"

Sokeman and Ross exchanged glances. "Yes," Ross said.

Miranda waited while the three men broke camp. Her eyes followed Dirk Huygens as he worked, and always she smiled. When they were ready she led them along the trail.

THEY walked for a long time, always slightly up, through the heavy, quiet air. Miranda said at last, "We turn to the right here. Do you see?" She indicated a barely perceptible track. "This is the way to the people, to those who have their desire. The other way leads to the Hands."

There were too many questions in Huygens' mind for him to ask any of them.

He walked beside Miranda silently. Behind him the two men were talking in low tones. He heard Ross say something like "When I was a child . . . this place . . ." and then Sokeman's murmured, inaudible reply.

They came to the top of a slight rise. Below them, in a shallow valley, was a group of squat structures in a semicircle. They were small, almost huts, and there was about them an indefinable air of desolation and abandonment. "This is where the people live," Miranda said, turning to speak over her shoulder. "Shall we go down to them?"

Sokeman and Ross said "Yes" almost together. Ross was frowning and his lips were tight.

They had gone a few steps when a man came stumbling up the slope toward them. He collapsed almost at their feet. He was gaunt to the point of emaciation, with staring, bloodshot eyes, and his scanty clothing hung in tatters around him. Miranda walked around him with calm indifference. Huygens saw that the man was dead drunk. As they passed him, he tipped a phlomis bottle up with a shaking hand to get the last few drops from it. The bottle gave an unlikely gurgle as he lowered it.

There was a flash of movement ahead in the clear space where the houses were. Miranda led the three men toward it. When they had got close enough Huygens saw that it was a woman—surely an elderly woman, dressed in faded violet taffeta—who was moving in the measures of an intricate dance with a huge young man. The man moved with the precision of clockwork, as smoothly as if inaudible music were regulating him, but the woman stumbled from time to time. About and about they went in their fantastic dance against the background of the blackish trees, while streamers and tags of mist drifted slowly toward them.

As they moved closer to Huygens in their rhythmic circling, he saw that the woman was, as he had thought, wrinkled and old. Her partner, however, had the bland, impossible perfection of a dummy in a display of fashionable clothing. His empty face was bent down to the gray-haired woman in what was almost a caricature of admiring attentiveness.

Three other men, as alike him as peas, were waiting at the edge of the clear space. One of them stepped up to the dancing couple and tapped the huge young man on the shoulder. And docilely the dancing giant resigned the gray-haired woman to the second man. He moved off with her in the perfect and uncanny clockwork step.

"She dances," Miranda said as if in explanation. "Always she dances. It is her desire."

The elderly dancer stopped abruptly. "I'm tired," she whimpered. Instantly the man who had been dancing with her knelt before her and kissed her hand. It was a parody of adoration. Then he picked her up in his enormous arms and, holding her as if she were something infinitely precious and frail, carried her off to one of the huts. The other three men followed behind.

The grotesque spectacle had kept Huygens silent. Now he turned to Miranda. "What is it?" he demanded. "I don't understand. Are they all like this?"

"All? Oh, no." Miranda shook her bright head. "Their desires are different, you see." She hesitated. "They stay in the huts most of the time," she said. "If you want to see them, you must look in the windows. They will not care. They will not notice you."

Ross had already gone to the window of the nearest hut and was looking in. After an instant Huygens followed him.

The light was bad. At first all Huygens could see was a heap of something on the floor and, seemingly buried in it, the head and shoulders of a man. Then he perceived that the heap was a glinting mass of faceted jewels, sending out sparks of purple, red, green, topaz, and gold. A naked man, wizened and under-sized, was standing waist-deep in the pile. He was plunging his hands in it over and over, bringing up handfuls of corruscating jewels and letting them drop over his head and breast.

In the next hut a woman sat on a low bed. In her arms she held a young child. She talked to it, played with it, rocked it in her arms. And all the time the child was perfectly passive and mute.

Once only it moved its hands a little. There was something horrible in its inactivity.

"Have you seen enough?" Miranda asked as he turned from the window. "Are you

ready to go to the place of shaping, to visit the Hands?"

Ross drew in his breath. Almost diffidently he asked, "Is it allowed? May anyone . . . shape with the Hands?"

"Oh, yes," Miranda answered with a grave smile. "This is the island of the Hands."

SHE turned and began leading them around the semicircle of buildings. Huygens followed her automatically. His mind was in confusion. As they began to walk uphill again he said, "What is this place, Miranda? Ross and Sokeman seem to understand, but I don't."

"What do you want to know?" Miranda asked in her sweet voice.

"What the island is, what those people are doing here, what the Hands are—everything. How was it we didn't see the island? What made our plane crash?"

"I will tell you what I know," Miranda said. She put out her hand and touched his arm lightly, smiling. With a shock of surprise he saw that on her finger was a gem-set wedding ring.

"The Island of the Hands was made by a great, by a supreme, man of science long ago. He had lost his wife, and he felt he could not live without her. He made the place of shaping so he could bring her back. You will understand that part better when you see the Hands.

"After he died, the island remained. People began to come to it, one or two a year, people who had desires they could not bear to leave ungratified. They come to the islands, and with the Hands they make their desires. And they live in the huts—I don't know who built them—until they die.

"The island cannot be seen from above. Only a little of its coast is visible from the water's edge. There is a—a space around the Hands that bends the rays of light. And force goes up from the place of shaping. Your plane crashed against that force."

Some of Huygens' confusion was gone, but a mystery remained. "Who are you?" he said to the woman who looked so uncannily like Joan. "What are you doing here?"

"I am Miranda," she answered readily. "This is where I live."

"But—" Huygens bit his lip. He fell silent, his head lowered, as he tried to think.

Ross and Sokeman were talking behind him. He heard Sokeman say something about the rucksack of food Ross had left behind at the camping place, and then remark, "I'm not hungry. That's strange. We haven't had anything to eat today."

"I don't think we need to eat here," Ross answered. In a more intimate tone he said, "What are you going to make for yourself, Chet?" There was a pause. Then, for answer, came only Sokeman's nervous laugh.

The place of shaping surprised Dirk. He had been expecting he hardly knew what—an amphitheatre, a building like a temple, a huge cave. But Miranda merely led them to a level spot, clear of trees, where the white mists that floated over the island were almost chokingly thick. Then, as he peered and strained his eyes, he saw, very dimly through the mist, the outline of a huge, a gigantic, a cyclopean pair of hands. The fingers of one hand rested lightly on the back of the other, and though the hands were as quiet as if they had been hewn out of stone, it was as if they but rested from the labor of creation, and would again create.

"Go no nearer," Miranda said warningly. "Do you see the line?" She indicated a luminous mark, as slender as a thread, that ran off on both sides into the thick white mist. "You must not step over that. It is very dangerous.

"Now, this is the way that the shaping is done. The one who would create his desire for himself kneels in front of the line and stretches his hands over the line into the fog. And what he wants he thinks of with all his heart and his soul and his hope. And the Hands shape his desire for him.

"Dirk, I am not that Joan whom you lost. Will you be the first to use the Hands? Will you have the Hands shape her again for you?"

Huygens' heart gave a bound. He realized now that he had repressed awareness of the possibility of which Miranda spoke into the depths of his brain. It was impossible, it was wonderful, it was horrible. He thought of the child, inert as a dummy, he had seen on the woman's lap in the hut. He thought of the blank, fatuous faces of the men who

had danced with the woman in the violet dress. "Would she—would she be really Joan?" he asked. "Would what I made be Joan the way she really was?"

Miranda raised her shoulders in a tiny shrug. "There are two things, I think, that determine what the hands shape. One is the force of the longing, the force of the desire. The other is the clearness of the image in the mind. But if the shaper does not like what the Hands have shaped for him, he can let the creation slip back into the mist.

"One thing more I must tell you. You may use the Hands for shaping but once. You may stay here as long as you like, having the Hands shape and reshape your desire for you, until it is as close as may be to what is in your heart. But once you have taken your hands from the fog, you can never put them in again. No one is strong enough. You would be lost."

"A radiation," the part of Huygens' brain which could still function was saying. "Perhaps a radiation to which a second exposure brings death . . . Joan, Joan, Joan! What shall I do?"

Miranda was studying him with her hazel eyes. "Let one of the others be first, then," she said. "Watch one of them use the Hands, Dirk."

SOKEMAN stepped forward. His grayish face was faintly flushed. He knelt down on the ground. Slowly he stretched out his hands over the line into the fog. They disappeared. And the gigantic Hands in the fog before him—were they a long way off, or were they close?—began to stir.

Sokeman's eyes were closed. He seemed to be barely breathing. The Hands hesitated, trembled. Then, working in the mist like a sculptor shaping plastic clay, they began to create.

An opalescent flask of xoanon floated phantasmagorically in the mist. It faded, was followed by a succession of bottles and flasks. Dirk recognized one or two liquors which had the reputation of being nerve poisons among them. A stack of currency flicked into being and out of it again. There followed more bottles and flasks.

"None of those is what he really wants," Miranda said softly in Dirk's ear. "Wait. He will get over being shy in a little while."

The Hands paused. Then they began to work again, but not as before. This time there was a purpose and intentness which had been lacking. The Hands worked in the fog, slowly and thoughtfully, for a long time. Sokeman's face had a dark, congested, look. But at last he drew his hands out of the fog. There was a golden phial in one of them.

"What is it?" Dirk said to Miranda.

"A drug, I think. Yes." Sokeman had gone a few steps with the phial in his hand. Now he halted, half-turned away from them, and tipped something from the phial on the back of his wrist. He raised the wrist to his lips and touched it with the tip of his tongue.

"Will you be next, Dirk?" Miranda said.

"I—" He saw that her whole body was trembling. Her hands were clenched until the knuckles were white. "Why do you want me to try?" he asked.

She looked so exactly like Joan as she answered, "Because, because I have to know," that a wave of longing swept over him. Without a word he knelt down by the shining line and thrust his hands into the mist.

It was as if he had plunged them into a swift cold stream. The force seemed to tug and wrench at his body. And along with the sensation of coldness and swift motion there was a peculiar languor and fatigue, as if his will were being sucked away from him.

Huygens bit his lip. The Hands were stirring. With all his force he brought Joan before his mind, Joan as she had been one day late in spring when they had gone cruising among the islands. She had stood by the prow of the cruiser, leaning forward into the wind and laughing, and her youth had been like the flash of the sun on the ripple of the water.

He could not live without her. He would bring her back.

The Hands paused in their labor. Joan moved toward him through the mist, smiling, her head held high: and if there was a blankness in her eyes, he could ignore it, he needed her so. But when she was almost up to him she wavered like a reflection in disturbed water. For all his desperate trying

she grew dimmer and at last dissolved. There was nothing there in the mist.

Another phantasm of Joan came toward him. She faded, was replaced by another image and another one. Always they had that curious blankness in the eyes. Dirk felt that his life was going out into the images his desperation created. And yet they would not live.

His mind caught at other aspects of Joan. A wave of perfume—the perfume she had used—came toward him from the mist. It was fresh and mysterious and exciting all at once; it made his heart pound with longing for her. For a moment, before the perfume floated away, Huygens felt the warmth and enveloping tenderness of Joan so clearly that he was certain she must be standing beside him. Then the perfume faded and a second later the sense of Joan's physical presence went too. Huygens, his hands tingling with that cold languor, strove desperately to bring her image before his mind once more. But something always eluded him in her—the look in the eyes, the lift of the chin, the shape of the face.

He kept on trying long after he knew its hopelessness. Time after time he created, while Miranda waited patiently. The Joans he made had grown as frail as candle-smoke, before he gave up at last. He turned to Miranda and said, "I loved her, though."

"Yes." Miranda's face was expressionless, but she seemed taller than she had been, and her eyes glowed. After a moment she said, "I think that is why you could not make her, Dirk. When a man loves a woman, he cannot detach her enough from him to see her clearly. His love for her makes a mist. Joan was not a woman for you, but a climate within which you could feel and think. *He*—" she motioned to Ross, who had knelt down by the line as soon as Huygens had risen—"will have no such difficulty in shaping a woman for himself."

It was true, the Hands were shaping a voluptuous, full-bodied woman for the other pilot. He was grinning and his eyes were hard. Huygens watched unseeingly for a moment. Then he turned away.

"Where are you going?" Miranda asked quickly.

"Back to the wreck of Joan's plane. To bury her."

HE HAD buried her, and night had come on. Now he sat sleepless under one of the black trees and listened to the hiss . . . hiss . . . hiss . . . of the waves as they rolled on the beach. His mind was full of loss and pain.

A shadow moved. Miranda came toward him. She sat down beside him. For a time there was silence. Then Miranda said in her sweet voice, "Do not grieve so, Dirk."

He turned on her savagely. "Don't grieve! When I've lost her! When—" He could not go on.

"Poor Dirk."

"Who are you, Miranda? I know you're not Joan. But you're so like her. . . . I keep thinking that you'll say to me, 'Yes, I'm Joan. It was only a joke, I was only teasing you. I won't tease you any more. I'm Joan, your wife.' "

Miranda laid her hand over his and he felt such a warmth of tenderness flow out from her that it dizzied him. He caught at her, not in desire, but in loneliness and despair. "Whoever you are—Oh, be Joan! Be Joan!" he said.

She put her arms around him tenderly. "Dirk, sweetheart. Darling. Oh, yes. I'm whoever you want me to be."

When the gray day had come and it was light, he said to her, "Why do you look at me so much, Miranda? Whenever I look at you, you are watching me."

She scooped up sand and let it trickle through her fingers. "Because I love you, Dirk," she answered. "I love to look at you."

"But—don't you ever think about anything except me? Is love all you ever think about?"

She raised her eyebrows a little, as if she were surprised. "Why, yes. What else should I think of? What else is there in life but love?"

"You're a strange woman, Miranda."

She took his hand and put it against her breast so he could feel the beating of her heart. "I'm not strange," she said earnestly. "Do you feel my heart beating? It beats because I love you. I'm a woman who . . . who was made to give and receive love."

Huygens looked at her and nodded. "Yes," he answered somberly.

The next night was nearly over when Huygens woke abruptly from sleep. He had been dreaming of Joan. For a moment he lay listening to Miranda's quiet breathing. Then he put out his hand to wake her. He had buried Joan two days ago. But in this moment he knew, with perfect and unshakable conviction, that Joan was not dead.

MIRANDA roused at his touch. She sat up, and even in the darkness he knew that she was smiling. "What is it, Dirk?"

"Where is Joan?"

She drew away from him. "She is dead. You . . . buried her yourself."

"She is not dead." He caught her wrist in a savage grip. "You know where she is. Tell me. If you won't, I'll make you tell."

"You're hurting me," Miranda said sadly. ". . . It wasn't enough, was it? I might have known. But you can't get her back, Dirk."

"Where is she?"

"In the place of shaping. Inside the mist."

He got to his feet. Miranda sprang up after him, in quick alarm. "You can't go after her. If you do, you will never come out."

"Even if that was true," he said quietly, "do you think I'd stay here? When Joan is still alive?"

Miranda said nothing more. She watched and followed him to the place of shaping. He felt a moment of pity for her as she stood there, so quiet and lonely. "Goodbye," he said. Then he stepped over the line into the mist.

It was as if he had stepped into a roaring world of greenish glass. A current caught at him fiercely, and he felt himself toppling. He struggled against it, and it noosed itself treacherously about his knees and sent him sideways, up, about, down, and up again. His muscles flexed to fight it; then he remembered that Joan, somewhere within this glassy flux, must have been gripped by the current as he was. Wisely he ceased to resist.

Time passed, if there time had meaning. There were desperate eddies, whirlpools, watery precipices. Sometimes he seemed to be climbing shuddering crystal alps or leaping incredible crevices. He toiled onward over a plain of vitreous volcanic rock. And always, mingled with his exertions, real or unreal, came the awareness that will and intelligence were leaving him.

The motion slackened at last. He was borne almost gently on. He floated to a halt and stranded, as if whatever had carried him hither had abandoned him. Torpidly he felt that he had come to the dead center of things. Everything ended here, in sleep and uncreation, in the ambiguous twilight haze.

Joan was somewhere, needed him. He would not sleep. Desperately he roused himself and stared around the sad, dull-colored expanse. Fragments of creation floated by him—wraith-like faces, dim jewels, disarticulated limbs. And with these were stranger shapes and constructions, contours of which he could find no analogue and no name. Neither at this nor any other time did he see any sign of the Hands.

Joan came toward him, smiling, and another Joan after her and another. There were ten, twenty, a hundred. And still they seemed to form from the haze like bubbles and break as bubbles break. They stood about him smiling dimly, and he saw with dull eyes that for every Joan a phantom Dirk Huygens had sprung up and stood holding out his vague arms to her.

Lethargy weighed on him always more heavily. He tried to walk toward the wavering phantoms and found that his limbs were remote and disobedient as if a dream. He sank to his knees and crawled a little way. Then he fell over on his side and sleep claimed him utterly.

AT THE center of him something was groaning and crying out and striving to waken him, as a man might beat on a stone wall with ineffectual hands. He roused a little at last, and then more, as fear grew in him. The unsleeping sentinel in the depths of the mind told him clearly that if he slept again he would not wake. This was his last chance. He must find Joan now or lie sleeping on the dun-colored plain until time had come to an end. But his

torpor was dreadful, like a crushing burden. He could scarcely breathe under it.

He sank his teeth into his lower lip with all his strength. The flesh broke. As the blood began to trickle his head cleared.

Where could Joan be? Had the myriad phantom Joans come from her? If the current that had floated him here had brought her too, she could not be far. But near and far, in this ambiguous place, were all one. He looked around and thought he saw a low mound disturb the plain ahead. He plodded toward it. But when he reached it it was the body of a man, flattened by slumber, who might have been lying there for centuries while sleep silted over him. And Huygens' heavy eyes could make out no other mound against the dead level of the plain.

A leaden hopelessness came over him. He wanted to lie down beside the unknown man and let sleep drown him. To fight the desire, he ground his teeth into his already wounded lip. And as pain burned along his nerves he felt, for a moment only, the pointing of the compass in his head.

He gasped with relief. At a stumbling run he started toward the point to which it had directed him. And though he moved more and more slowly—it was as though the spot toward which he struggled was the source of the vast choking lethargy which lay on everything—he never stopped moving. He toiled through thickening cobwebs for a time that might have been centuries. And he came to Joan at last.

It was real Joan. She lay in a shallow depression into which she had drifted, and she was as wan and bloodless as the twilight around her. There was a jagged scar under her left breast, as if whatever wound she had received had healed distortedly. But she was alive.

He gathered her in his arms and kissed her. She stirred and opened drowned eyes to him. "Oh . . . Dirk . . . How alive you are! I dreamed of you. Have I been dead?"

"Get up, Joan," he said thickly. "We have to—to—" He could not remember the word.

"Go to sleep," she said, as if to a child. "This place hates us awake. We are too alive for it. Go back to sleep." She was sinking away from his embrace.

He dug his nails into her wrist. She gave a tiny cry, and he pulled her to her feet. "Wake up!" he said desperately.

"Ah, why? We can never leave."

It was true, he saw. How could he push his way alone, much less cumbered with Joan, through the glassy torrent that had floated him here? Awake, Joan and he vexed this sad, dun-colored world; and it would cover them with layer upon layer of lethargy. They could never escape.

It did not much matter. But he had wanted her when he was awake. He would kiss her once more before sleep covered them.

He tipped her head up and put his lips to hers. And because it was Joan's mouth he touched, the contact was sweet to him.

She stirred and put her arms around his shoulders. "When you touch me," she said laboriously, "I feel more awake." She managed to smile at him.

More awake. Yes, it was as if between their two bodies they sheltered a tiny warmth of consciousness from the chill lethargy of this dead place. He kissed her again, embracing her tenderly, and before he had taken his lips from hers he felt a weak current fretting at his heels.

The current which had seized him when he stepped over the shining line into the place of shaping had been glassy and smooth, for all its violence. But even in its infancy this new force was as jagged and rough as if it flowed flint knives. Cross currents jarred and warred within it, and as its strength increased he felt his flesh wounded by it a thousand times.

The noise it made was a confused, painful screaming. Joan said almost inaudibly, ". . . . to get rid of us." The sound of the flow rose to a rattling hysteria. Then Huygens clasped his wife in a rigid grip and the jagged torrent closed over them.

They were hurled head over heels with crazy violence. Dirk had hallucinated moments when he felt they were standing motionless on a broad plain while rocks beat up at them. He forced Joan's head down against his shoulder to protect her face, and as well as he could he sheltered her with his body and his limbs. There were times when the current would run smooth as glass, and he dreaded these times most, for then the numbing lethargy would come over him

again. He knew that if his grip on Joan relaxed now she would be lost utterly, hopelessly.

They were dropping through jagged stars from a high, high cliff. The stars burned his flesh like fire, and he held Joan in a tighter grasp. They rose through a mesh of stinging fireflies, they sank into a pit whose stone sides rustled cruelly at them. No, they were still standing in the autumnal haze, embracing benumbedly. The current was beating against them bitterly, like hail. And suddenly Dirk knew that its tormented force had brought them to the edge of its world, to the shining line.

THERE was some reason, Dirk knew, why he and Joan must get over it. Some reason. . . . But he could not remember what the reason was. And who was Joan? Who was Dirk?

The current welled up in a glassy crescendo. Joan was half torn from his arms. He struggled after her wildly, caught her by one wrist. Still holding her, he fought upward through an excoriating rain. Though he had forgotten who he was, he knew that it was laid on him as a law to battle upward, never to let Joan go.

The moment tautened like a bow string. Dirk made a last, consuming effort. And then he and Joan were over the line.

They lay exhausted on the ground for many minutes, like people half-drowned. When Dirk's strength had come back a little, he went to the place where he and the others had camped on the first night, and brought back blankets and the aid kit. He smoothed ointment over Joan's bleeding limbs and covered her with the blankets. He looked toward the Hands, wondering at the difference between what seemed to be reality on this side of the line and on that. Then he lay down beside her and fell instantly into deep natural sleep.

It was nearly a day later when he awoke. Miranda was standing near him.

She looked at him and Joan. Her face was white. Slowly she said, "You brought her back, then, Dirk." Her voice was sweet as she said it, and for all her pallor Dirk thought he had never seen a woman as beautiful.

Joan stirred and sat up. She looked at Miranda and her eyes widened. She got to her feet. "You lived, then," she said.

Miranda laughed. "Sister—mother—" she answered, "why should I not live?"

Dirk drew in his breath. He stared at their two faces, so uncannily alike. "What does she mean?" he asked his wife.

"That I made her," Joan said.

There was an instant's silence. The words he had just heard echoed meaninglessly in Dirk Huygens' brain. Then Joan said, "I made her, you see. When my plane crashed on the island, I was badly hurt. I knew I had not long to live, and I knew what island this was. I didn't want to die.

"I went to the place of shaping. It was a hard trip for me. When I got there I knelt by the line and put my hands into the mist. And I had the Hands shape Joan, shape my own self, for me.

"I didn't want to die, you see, Dirk, and I thought that if another Joan, a Joan just like me, lived on, I would not be really dead. But when Joan came out of the mist to me I knew that I had not made her well. Her face was vacant and strange, and she moved weakly, as if she was barely alive."

Dirk started. He looked at Miranda and knew by her expression that his surmise was right. "She did not live," he said to Joan. "She went back to the wreck of the plane and died there. I buried her."

Joan nodded. "It was wrong," she said, twisting her fingers. "I should not have done it. It was wrong.

"When I saw that the second Joan would not go on living, I tried again. I put my hands back into the mist—Oh, how strong the current was, it pulled like death!—and had the Hands shape for me once more. And this time they shaped Miranda.

"Miranda, Dirk, is Joan as I always wanted her to be. When I made her I made myself after the pattern of a secret dream I had. She is more beautiful than I, taller, she has a sweeter voice. Even her name is different from mine. I never liked my name."

Comprehension was coming to Huygens. Miranda, then, was Joan's idealized picture of herself. Even the gem-set wedding ring on Miranda's hand—Joan had said once that she preferred gem-set bands to plain.

"I made her with all the strength and

longing that were in me. I made her loving you, Dirk, because I was dying and was sick for you. And when she came out of the mist toward me I saw that she was well made and would live.

"I fainted then. The current swept me away with it. And after that there was nothing except sleep and heavy dreams, Dirk, until you came and woke me up. You brought me back to life." She turned to her husband. Dirk drew her to him and held her for a moment, embraced.

"You have won, real woman," Miranda said bitterly. "You have taken the real man from me, who am not quite real. Take him and have your desire of him, then. But I had him once." She put her hands over her eyes.

Joan took a step toward her. "Forgive me, Miranda," she said humbly. "I should never have shaped you. Forgive me for it." There were tears on her cheeks.

Miranda uncovered her face. She was as pale as death, but Dirk saw that she was dry-eyed. "You have done me no wrong," she said proudly. "Take your man and go. There are boats on the beach. I wish you joy of him. Good-bye." She turned away.

"What will you do, Miranda?" Joan asked, weeping. "What will become of you?"

"Oh, I?" Miranda said. She laughed. "I will go to the place of shaping and make Dirk for myself. I will shape him with all the love that is in me, and he will love me and be my desire. And if he is not quite real, why, neither am I quite real." She started through the trees.

Joan cried out in pity. She would have gone after Miranda, but Dirk held her back. "Let her go," he said, though he was deeply troubled. "We cannot help her. This is best for her."

For a moment he and Joan looked at Miranda as she walked away, her head high. Dirk knew that he would remember Miranda, her beauty and the love she had given him, to the end of his days. Then he and Joan started down to the beach, toward the clean, effacing sea and the boats which would take them away.

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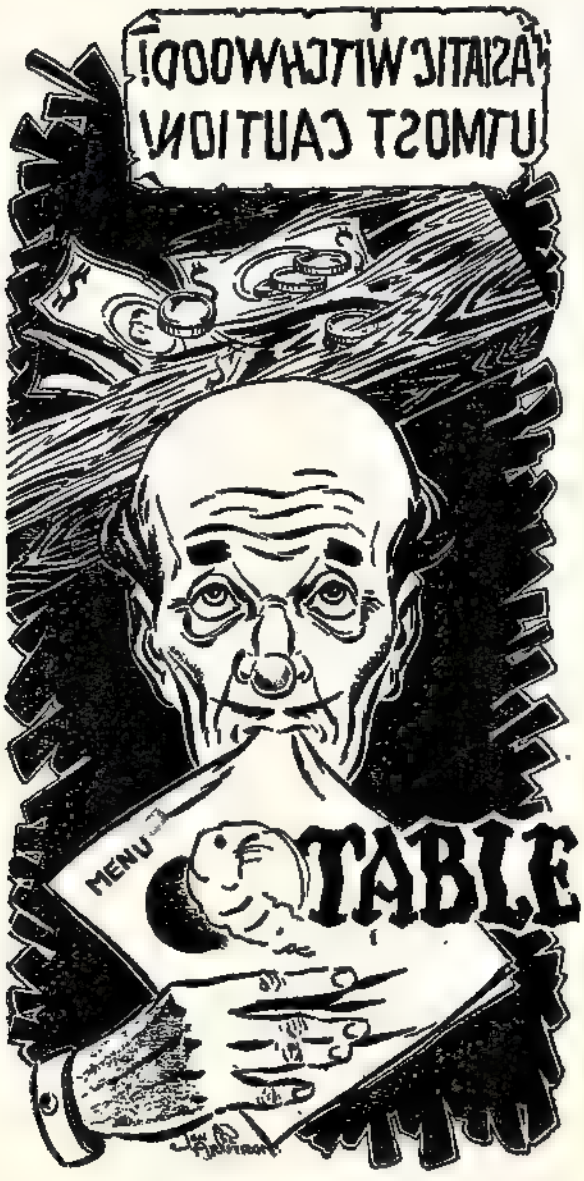

Heading by Jon Arfstrom

TABLE NUMBER 16

BY CURTIS W. CAREWIT

LAST month, the New York building inspectors appeared at a restaurant in the lower fifties and condemned it. Why did they resort to such drastic action? Was it because of some ill-fated happenings at this establishment, or merely on account of its miserable roof and cellar? It may have been either.

There is no doubt that the WHISPERING SHRIMP Restaurant was exceedingly popular. For a decade, the editors of "Amedee's Guide to Good Eating" praised its cuisine and atmosphere. The dining-room itself—let alone the connecting bar—was worth seeing.

For one thing, the ceiling was extremely low, and cluttered with menus and recipes of Shrimp *mongole, thermidor* and *creole*; for another, there were two dozen painted shrimp on each wall. They stood and reclined together, in a vague pretense of whispering. Fishing nets had been strung over the corners, Neptunes floated through the carpets.

The chairs were an agglomeration of antiquities, representing rowboats and gondolas, and even several rickshas. The tables could be recognized as submarines; several aircraft-carriers had been added, to keep up with the times. Seaweed contributed a touch of realism.

These *objets d'art* were due to the globe-trotter, who owned the establishment, a man named Elmer Melrose. Melrose was rarely in New York. He undertook voyages to far-flung places, while his two accountants and a headwaiter traveled diligently into his cash-registers. While this trio saw to the right (or wrong) things at the WHISPERING SHRIMP, the restaurateur was really quite content; he kept sending the quaint furniture from Hong-Kong, Bengasi, or Capetown, and took whatever cash there was left. Usually it was enough. He trusted the accountants to look after the headwaiter, the headwaiter after the waiters, and from there down to the humblest kitchenmaid.

ACCORDINGLY, one particular evening, a waiter named Joe Pistozzi leaned against a fishing net, and watched the busboys. It was five-forty five, and they

were setting the tables. Because Joe was a musical and dreamy little fellow, he derived pleasure from the muffled clatter of silver, the ringing of glass, and the boys' white uniforms against the green decor of the room.

SUDDENLY, the door burst open, and two men staggered in. They carried a crate. Behind the crate entered Emil Hasslinger, headwaiter, with as much majesty as the obstacle ahead of him permitted. Joe noticed that the crate was black, and adorned with gold. Gleefully, Joe thought that it looked like a casket, and if it were just a little longer, a fine casket for Emil. And it was true the headwaiter looked cadaverous. In fact, his face was so white that you could have associated it with a mortician's embalming wax.

He carried a bulky portfolio in one hand, and a pair of white gloves in the other. Joe saw him dispose of both, then pass the two men.

"This way—" he pointed. "This way, please!" The men followed with difficulty, for the whole flotilla of furniture had to be moved out of their way.

After much shuffling and pushing, the group reached Joe's corner. It was still early, and the waiter wore his white shirt, a shabby bow-tie, and a pair of liquid-spotted tuxedo pants, held up by faded suspenders.

"Give us a hand," said Emil, His voice had the crunching sound of chipped ice.

Joe knew at once that his superior was in a bad mood; for a few seconds he mused about the cause, then ascribed it to Emil's lady friend. Her cost was indeed hard to bear.

"Come on," Emil repeated.

Joe's round and polished face broke out into a grin, and he helped the two men set the box on the floor.

THE headwaiter stood rigidly, his face expressionless. The men wiped their faces with the back of their hands. Joe studied the crate. After a moment, he said, "Look, Signor Emil! Dere isa sign!"

The other stooped down, like an automaton. Joe pointed to a damaged label, which read:

From: The Singapore Furniture Co.
To: The Whispering Shrimp Restaurant, N. Y. C.
EXPERIMENTAL! CAUTION!
Remarks: Emil, here is something new. Don't open the crate till I get back to New York. On my way shortly.
Melrose.

Joe rubbed his broad honest face. "No open, eh? Isa sometin' speciale—!"

"Never mind instructions," Emil said. "We've got to replace number sixteen."

He waved to the workmen who presently attacked the boards of the packing case until a rectangular table appeared—a table for two.

"Eh! Come e bella!" marveled Joe who always expressed his delight, in a style all his own.

Then he looked at the crate again, and at the label. He saw the word "caution" and once more he thought of Emil's girl friend. As he and every dishwasher knew, she had a passion for glitterstones and other trifles, worn around neck, arms or fingers.

Caution. Caution.

"Don't just stand there, Joe. Get the old table out of the way. And hurry with my dinner!"

The little fellow said, "Yeah, right now."

But instead of leaving, he examined the wooden newcomer. Busboys, waiters and barmen were also looking on. The table proved to be a rather common red mahogany affair, thick, shiny and visibly heavy. There were no adornments, except the gold rings around the legs.

Joe continued to scrutinize it, and soon exclaimed, "*Perbacco!* Another sign!"

"That's enough now!" said Emil.

But Joe had seen the slip which was pasted inside one side of the table. Its lopsided smudged letters looked like:

Joe tried to decipher the strange idiom, he only spoke *napoletano*, and English of sorts. He wondered, whether Emil who

knew three languages, and had gotten around, could understand this one. But Emil had already shoved the table against the wall, with the help of two boys and his own precise, little motions.

ANOTHER boy brought salt, pepper and utensils and Joe finally trudged into the kitchen, to return shortly, with Emil's Spare Ribs and *kraut*, and a glass of Burgundy from the bar.

His master was seated, and Joe stood behind him, his foot scraping the carpet.

"Scuse me," he at last began.

Emil, with circular movements, spread butter on a roll. He used the knife like a designer would handle a compass. "What was it?" he asked.

"Datsa good news," said Joe shyly. "My wife hasa new——baby!"

"Good," replied Emil, sipping at the wine.

"No, natsa good."

"Why?"

The waiter stepped around, and faced the eating man who was just draining a fruit-cup, by lifting it and pouring the last drop of syrup into his spoon. Joe waited. When Emil looked up, Joe said, "Money. Babies costa money." He thought of nipples and bottles and—"Please senda lotsa guests, tonight?"

"Well," said Emil, wiping his thin lips. "I——"

There was a pause, after which the little man, as he had often done before, reached into his pocket. When he was sure that no one was looking, he drew out two dollar bills. His superior, as accustomed to bribery, as a member of the *Corps Diplomatique* is to a signature on a document, seized the two bills slowly. When his bony hand above the new table touched them, something strange happened. Joe saw the green paper pulling downward, almost out of the receiver's hands. Emil grasped the money, however, folded it quickly, and, one eyebrow raised, pushed it into his tuxedo pocket.

The waiter did not muse about the phenomenon; instead, his imagination began to play with the great possibilities two dollars could offer, respectively to his wife and Emil's lady friend.

UPON arrival of the first patron, Emil folded his napkin into six neat parts, arose and went toward him. Above his head hung the chandeliers, shaped like reversed shrimp cocktails. As he maneuvered the guest to a table, the light spread over Emil's hair, which was parted in the middle, and looked precisely as though a bucketful of wax had melted on it.

This thought cheered Joe, immeasurably and, after removing the plates, he slid into his tuxedo.

Other guests arrived, and the headwaiter shuttled between doors and chairs. His fingers executed impromptu movements with the oyster-shaped ashtrays, or the unique sugar bowls, while his head gestured to the staff. Smoke and whiffs of *sauces piquantes* spread in the air. What Amedee's Eating Guide termed as atmosphere, now settled over the place; from the greenness of the walls, it sank down to the nautical furniture, so that it all looked like a party at the bottom of the ocean.

By eight fifteen, Joe stood in the kitchen. Nickels, quarters and dimes were on a window sill in front of him, like a small regiment, the metal soldiers of which he counted. When Emil suddenly towered over him, Joe stopped moving his lips, and looked up anxiously.

"Isa funny sing," he remarked. "Dat first man I had tonight. He always leave' plenty tips."

"What of it?" Emil asked. His lips were so tight that they looked as if they had been sewn together.

"Well, he sat at de new table tonight—no? Datsa very baad."

Emil's hand crackled a lonely dollar in his own pocket. "Make it snappy," he said.

"The man left no tip dis time."

"It won't be the last time either," said Emil rather expansively for him. "Guests are unaccountable. Like—err—. Well, it even happens to me. And *I* need money too!" Joe reflected a moment about this superior's worthy purpose.

"Look at the door," went on Emil. "Another party. I bet that—"

AT THE entrance, a guest's hand moved forward and the headwaiter took it gingerly. This motion was immediately fol-

lowed by Emil's fingers slipping into his own pocket.

At seeing this, Joe shook his head a little, mumbled *Eh signore!* and returned to the gentleman at Table Number Sixteen, who was ready for his dessert. The waiter unfolded the bill of fare and came back with a "Custa puddi'." He also brought the check, presented this time on a cashtray.

While the man finished his meal, Joe's blue eyes peered from behind a pillar. It was a hectic evening. Diners were now sitting and waiting at all tables. Though hard-pressed, Joe did not move until he saw and heard the dropping of a coin into his plastic helper. No sooner was the patron out of sight, than Joe rushed forward. His stubby thumb grasped the tray.

There was a hole in it.

He stared at the tablecloth. There was another hole, sharp and black, just the size of a fifty-cent piece. His colleagues sailed by, and someone cried "Waitah, waitah!" but Joe was oblivious to the world around him.

Finally he covered the Table Number 16 with a couple of clean napkins, a practice at the WHISPERING SHRIMP, where, on occasion, the quality of food came before adequacy of service.

Just then Emil arrived. "You are slow tonight," he said sharply. "You can't handle all these tables."

Joe didn't answer immediately. He looked at a black gondola and at the headwaiter. Then, trembling, he set place silver out on the spread napkins.

Caution. Caution.

"Good heavens, Pistozzi, what *is* the matter with you?"

Joe's face now turned crimson, and he finally managed to get out a few words. *"Misericordia!"* he burst out. "Dere is soamting wrong wit de new table."

"What?"

"Is impossible to explain, Mr. Emil!"

"Anyway, better speed it up! I'll check later." With that, Emil left.

Joe went into the kitchen then, and stood lost amid a scrambling, yelling crowd. There was the scent of French Onion soup, garlic, croutons; it was hot, and the vapor crept through his tuxedo, penetrating the threadbare shirt. At last, with such a weird predicament as he had to cope with, it entered his head also.

It was still spinning when he returned to the dining-room. The tables were filled to capacity. A white-haired man now sat at Number Sixteen. He was a Senator, and a young creature, whose head was more dressed than her body seemed very occupied with him; alternately she looked into his eyes and at his carnation, cooing—for good measure—into his rosy ear.

Under these circumstances, Joe considered, the man would be worth two dollars, a sum that he immediately translated into two pairs of baby socks. So he served with as much *empressement* as he was capable of, after the evening's bewilderment. His mind's eye saw the *bambino's* fluffy head and its big, blue eyes, and he kept smiling, running and nodding.

When he brought the bill, Joe held the tray at the Senator's throat level. He dreaded the table now, and took no chances. With twenty dollars on his plastic device, he sped toward the cashier, a frowning and puzzled Senator following him with his eyes. Emil stood at the door, erect like a candle. In that position, as he studied the reservation books, Joe pulled at his sleeve. "Will you come wit' me?"

"More trouble?"

"I—I show you soamting!" said Joe.

They reached the Senator's table. He was scowling, and even his curvacious companion pursed her lips.

"Sir," the Senator asked, rising, "what's the hurry?"

"No hurry at all, sir," replied Emil, flashing a smile that disappeared like a razor blade in quicksand.

"Isa no urry," echoed Joe.

The gentleman's face smoothed out, and he pushed—*noblesse oblige*—a handful of large coins under the coffee cup.

The instant Emil had given his approving nod and the guests had left, there was a distinct scraping sound, audible in spite of the gabble of voices and rattling of cocktail shakers. Even as they watched, the coins slowly bored themselves through the table cloth. Then avidly through the second cloth. And finally with a grunting satisfaction into the mahogany—all this followed by a slight and excited vibration.

Both men stood riveted to the carpet for a long time. A quartet of mermaids at the bar began their act. They played and sang, "Soooo deep is the ooooshean—"

Joe bent over the table, and gave a curse which would have made the simplest citizen of Naples blush. Emil jerked the perforated cloth aside, and his long fingers moved over the surface. A busboy came, wanting to see what had happened, but Emil waved him away.

The money was there, perversely visible under a thin layer of wood. To extricate it without tools would have been impossible.

The little waiter's nerves were quite shattered. Fearfully he looked across the room. The shrimps on the wall, that had always whispered, now seemed to convulse themselves in merriment, leaping and blaring madly. The nets seemed to surround him viciously; and the Neptunes were gripping and poking at his feet. And voices were everywhere, as if they came from under water.

BY TEN, Emil had the table covered again and more patrons served on it. As the evening progressed, only a few coins went into Joe's pockets, while Number Sixteen remained insatiable.

The waiter tried to be vigilant, but ultimately confusion always got the better of him, so that the money-devouring crevices grabbed a lion's share of his receipts. Joe blamed it all on the *diavolo*, or failing his presence, on at least an imp. On occasion, he compared the table's greediness to that of his co-workers, and admitted that in eighteen years of service he had never seen such a thing.

Meanwhile, the headwaiter made the trips to the door and his pocket. When the former was filled with waiting guests, the latter abounded with currency. From time to time he showed up at Number Sixteen. His detachment was such that Joe kept his eye on him apprehensively. Somehow, he felt, that more evil was yet to come.

Once, Joe even walked to the table and said, "Looka here, if this *mascalzone* steal my money, you do something—no?" The table didn't answer, but a guest sitting at it looked up puzzled. "Hey," he asked, "what's goin' on?"

"Noting," said Joe, very much embarrassed.

Around eleven, the aircooling system developed a short. The fans worked furiously, but clouds of smoke spread quickly in the room. From the corner of his eye, Joe saw his superior talk briskly to two busboys. Immediately afterwards they came to remove Number Sixteen. They dragged it downstairs.

Joe knew that the *coup* was on. When he returned to the vacant spot, he found the dirty slip that had been pasted inside the side of the table. He read it, with alarm. It was right side out this time: ASIATIC WITCHWOOD! UTMOST CAUTION! He threw it down.

It had been a big evening, Joe reflected. A lot of money must be in the table; it was clear that Emil wanted the whole take. Hadn't he kept banquet tips? Hadn't he been a steward on the *Bremen*, but, as another shipmate revealed, been thrown out because of repeated smuggling? And his blackmarket connections, later? And—

So thinking, Joe became quite excited. As he carried a glass of sherry from the bar, he saw Emil—all nonchalance—walk toward the door, whence, a few minutes before, the table had gone. He ran toward him, the sherry dancing and slithering on the tray. Despair made him bold. He barred Emil's way.

"Whasa matter," he asked, "where you g—?"

"Sh-sh, look at your drink: It's a fine mess!"

"Is oright," Joe murmured, "where you going?" *You are stealing*, he thought. *Stealing!*

"I'm investigating," said Emil, forcing a smile. "You'd better go to your other—"

"*Signor* Emil, I've five small ones." His free hand waved five vehement fingers. "I must—"

"You must go to your guests now. Thank you."

"Datsa going to mean drouble."

Malice came into Emil's eyes. "Now go back to work, or—"

Joe stumbled back to his tables, fear and rage and indignation searing through him.

He waited for the boys to come up, then followed Emil down the squalid

stairs and through the labyrinth of corridors. The air was thick below, and the smells of coal and wine penetrated his nostrils; and because fine restaurants are often short of elegance in their cellars, Joe's legs thudded against trashcans and empty cases. Overhead ran giant pipes, water pipes and steam pipes and electrical circuits. Months' dust covered them all.

While he walked, his wife's picture flashed through his mind; he thought of Mario, Pia, Jimmy and the *bambino,* and of his big son overseas. He thought of Emil's extravagant woman. He thought of Elmer Melrose, the absent boss, who had, knowingly or unknowingly, brought a curse on them all.

Joe's footsteps echoed from the walls. Otherwise it was quiet, until—until he heard a thumping sound, and a stifled rattle from a man's throat.

He had walked in circles, but he now found his way to the boiler-room. There he stopped, out of breath.

He saw Emil on the floor, sprawled on his back. The table was squashed down on his face.

Joe, who was a pious little man, crossed himself and raised his eyes to the ceiling. But he was also a careful man, and, without touching anything, he bent down and looked under the table.

Emil lay quite still there. His neck and face were gently but firmly gripped by fibrous tentacles. There were traces of foam on the wood, as if it had enjoyed the meal.

No heroism could be ascribed to Joe, for he drew away immediately. On the floor, he saw the knife which his superior had been using to extricate the coins, and near it a sizable supply of nickels, quarters and dimes. Joe took them, repeating several prayers several times.

LATER that night, Elmer Melrose arrived from Singapore. Joe and the accountant took him down to the cellar where the boilermen and the police were lifting Emil's body from its stronghold. They used gloves and force. Emil's coat was glued to the wood. His tuxedo pocket was found to be empty, but under the surface of table Number Sixteen they discovered a handful of green, green bills.

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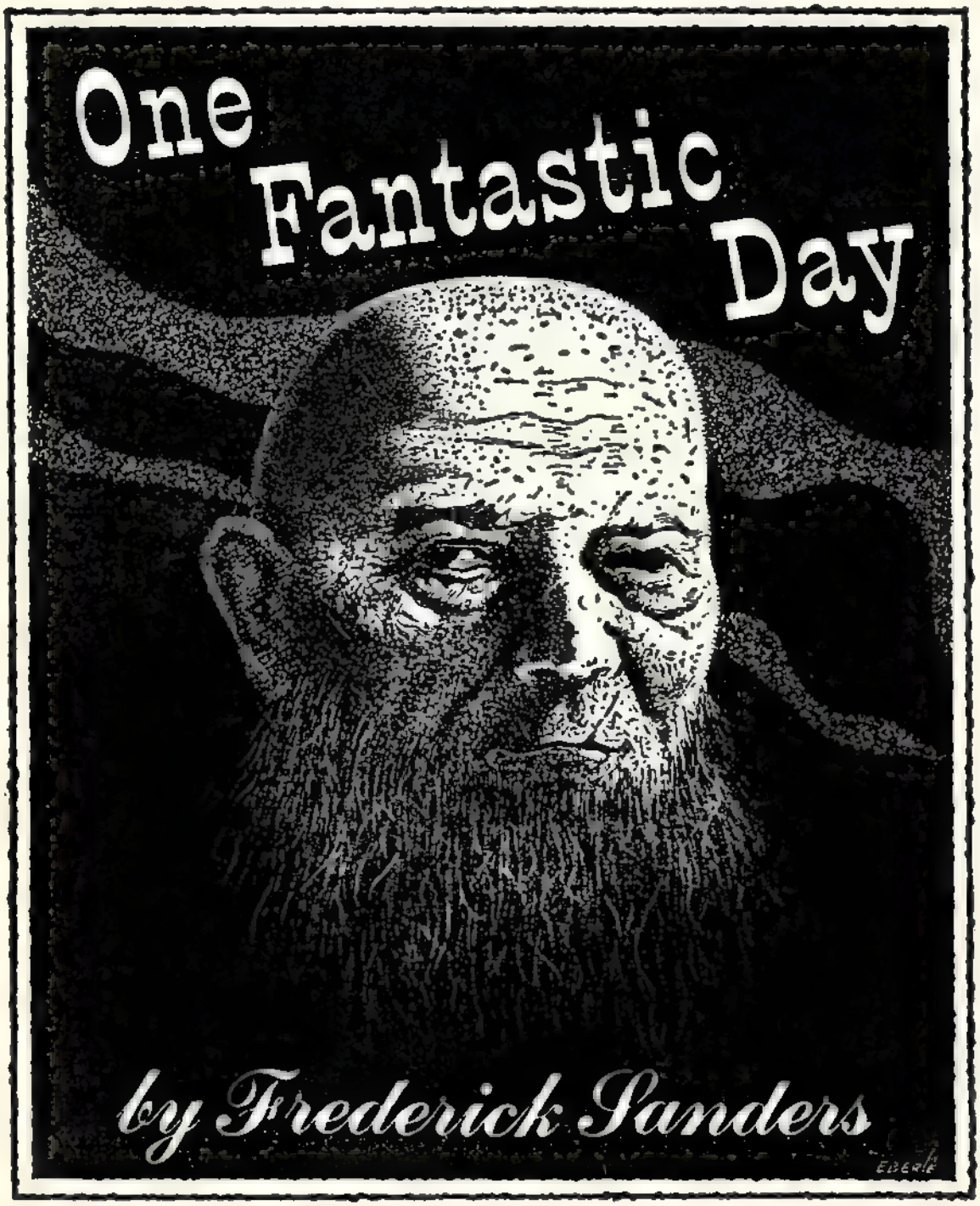


by Frederick Sanders

Heading by Joseph Eberle

THIS manuscript I am going to call "The Pevington Manuscript" for that is my surname. Up to a few weeks ago I had been a free man moving in a community of freedom. Yet tonight, even though I know at last that I shall very shortly regain that freedom I still feel utterly isolated, a close-kept personage, in the nothingness of a great inverted cone around which whirls the carefree world. Yes, very much

like a prisoner in a special vortex down which I am being slowly sucked towards some predestined end.

Owing to my home being some distance away and difficult to travel to, I cannot be released until tomorrow when proper early morning traveling facilities are available from this out-of-the-way country town, with its medieval-like prison and court house set upon the cone shaped hill that overlooks the tangle of small streets beneath. The railway-line skirts it to the west as if with its modernity and speeding trains it had wished to avoid this old place, not so much a township as a museum, recalling past centuries since the Romans first built an outpost fort upon the hill down, to the early years of the 19th century when some luckless laborer, accused of stealing a sheep from a local farmstead had been hung upon the old oak-tree that flourished in the very centre of the town-square.

From that time onwards this old town had gradually decayed, become quiet and somnolent, only awakening to feverish activity when the Assizes took place in the ancient court house, near the gray prison, on the sugar-loaf hill.

This year of 1921 will no doubt always be remembered as the year of the Great Drought, for our sea-girt little island, contrary to its usual haphazard weather, had been in old Sol's power for several months until the surprised feeling, not unpleasant, of having so many continuous weeks of sunny days wore off to give way to that of the uncanny and the rising fear that the delicately green land of England would be blasted by such an uncommonly long spell of scorching heat. Timid and superstitious folks began to wonder if rain would ever come again. Farmers, fearful for their crops and herds, openly cursed the flaming orb as it hung high in the wonderful blue vault of the sky, pulsing out its dry heat across millions of miles of space.

Thus, under a blazing sun, in a hard blue sky, week after week the Kentish countryside became more parched, great cracks and fissures intersected the fields and meadows; the corn ripened early into masses of still gold, and the lazy hum of insects made the scorching days feel even hotter with their monotonous sounds. The rivers ran low. Streams became mere trickles and the smaller ponds dried up. In the larger sheets of Wealden waters the fish grew restive, hungry, and almost gave themselves up to sleepy fishermen.

It was the idle thoughts of the shrinking volume of water in some of the larger Wealden ponds, with their fine large roach and fierce pike that set me drowsily recalling a certain famed sheet of fishing water some miles away from my home. It was lovely to conjecture what might be the luck of a fisherman rodding those sinking waters. For now if ever, was the chance to hook some fine specimen from those hazy-brown depths: prize-sized fish that had escaped the hooks of not only experienced fishers grown old in the tooth, but of men who had been dead these many years. Roach and pike-fish that had eluded time and again the wiles of not only my grandfather but my great-grandfather—such was the cunning of these minor monsters of the piscatorial kingdom that they had even escaped that greatest of all Weald fishermen . . . "Gaffer" Greenstone. It was my old schoolmaster, Mr. Greenstone, who had so often talked of the fishing ponds of the Kentish Weald country and one in particular he always spoke about with enthusiasm mixed with awe on account of the wonderful scaly creatures that lived therein. This certain pond, in fact it was more than that, for its size really gave it the status of a small lake, I had never visited. The fisherman's paradise, the old "Clayhole" at Chart Magna.

Many years ago a flourishing brick and tile works had thrived there and the clay workings had grown and extended over a great acreage. Then through some reason the place closed down, the clay workings gradually filled with water and some enterprising local fisherman stocked it very liberally with several kinds of fish. That was back in 1880. Within the space of twenty years the Clayhole had many fine fish in its waters. Wild ducks, coots and moorhens resided in the large clumps of reeds and bulrushes around its margins, while white-may thorn bushes encircled its high banks making it in all truth a veritable paradise for all keen fishermen.

In my mind's eye I could well imagine that expansive sheet of water throwing back the blazing shafts of sunshine, so dazzling to the eyes. Could almost see the myriad flashes of molten silver lights from every piece of its surface ruffled maybe by a truant zephyr or by the swirl of one of its gleaming inhabitants. The Clayhole would be lying out there in the heat-misty Weald, milky white in its purity, challenging the flaming sun high above it.

SO IT came about that I decided on a fishing holiday in August and made arrangements to stay at the home of Peter Houndstone an old school-chum of mine, who lived in the parish of Chart Magna, close to that village, and within easy reach of the Old Clayhole.

My own village Molesden was about forty miles from Chart Magna, and I reached my chum's home after a rattling journey, in more senses than one, by the "Albatross Bus Service", which consisted of one decrepit motor-vehicle of ancient vintage and solid rubber tires. Well, I got settled in and Peter proposed that after lunch we should leave on the long walk to the Clayhole, some three miles distant from my host's picturesque Tudor residence, "Honeysuckle Farm."

Under the guidance of friend Peter we set out to ramble over to the look-forward-to fishing place. Walking down the dusty lane we were about to pass a vegetation-covered heap of brick and tile rubble that reared its head amidst tall light green ash saplings.

"If we go round by the lane," remarked Peter, "it will be a hot and dusty walk. What say you to taking a shorter cut to the Clayhole?" I was agreeable. "Well, let's turn in here then and pick up the disused light railway track that leads right over to the "Clayhole". I've never been along the full distance, but it will make a change and should prove more interesting to us."

So we forced our way through the brush filled gap and skirting the old rubble heap found ourselves by the side of the rail track, which had, up to 1880 been the means of conveying the bricks and tiles from the works some three miles across country to the edge of the village where it links up with Chart Magna Railway Station on the main line that winds its serpentine way from London to the South Coast. For in those days the little lane was not much more than a cart-track from the village where it started and was too dangerous for heavy loads to be taken along its length. In fact the track itself had been laid upon an ancient road that in the late 18th century had served a hamlet called Hogsden, that had gradually decayed and vanished.

Soon we were well under way, and it seemed to me that we had been walking for hours along that sun-drenched railroad, studded with tall bushes, entangled with weeds and high grasses. We struggled, gasping, through that miniature jungle athwart the track, finally emerging into clearer surroundings. As I disentangled myself from a clutching bramble, my right foot caught in an exposed root that pitched me forward to crash heavily into a low evergreen bush. As the weight of my body crushed down the shrub, I threw out my arms to save myself, but ended upon the ground. A sharp pain stabbed into the palm of my right hand and shot up my arm. Climbing to my feet, I looked at my hand whence blood was beginning to flow from a puncture in the lower part of the palm. Wiping away the fluid I noticed brown rust in and around the slight wound. Stooping down I searched for what had caused the cut and observed a partly embedded small but heavy iron bar, rusted by age and exposure.

I SHOWED it to Peter who exclaimed jokingly, "Just the thing to commit murder with on a dark night!" As he ended his words a light shock seemed to flow from the rusted bar in my hand to permeate every fibre of my body and to earth itself through me into the ground beneath my feet. My head began to swim and a sick feeling gripped my stomach. In a few minutes the nausea passed and I threw the heavy bar down and turned my attention to my hand. I wiped the wound and sucked it clean.

Once again we got under way and, having got fully clear of the undergrowth, we came upon a large clear area continued as a narrowing vista down the old railroad right of way. On our left we were suddenly con-

fronted by an old stone built inn, standing some fifty yards from the track. A silent, sun-splashed edifice dozing in the sun's warmth. Outside hung a sign with a faded but rampant Red Horse upon it, while the peeling lettering on the sign-board proclaimed that the house was "The Red Horse Inn." Peter stopped, a look of surprise and perplexity upon his sun-tanned face. Was it fear trying to struggle through into his staring eyes? Did those grey windows of his mind hold back but half successfully some swift dread upflung from the limbo of the vast inner mind, acting upon some instinctive stimulus at the sight of that old four-square ale-house? He turned to me, so quickly and swiftly that I jumped.

"Rob," he said, in a hushed voice ending in a queer-little high pitched trill, "I'm sure that inn is not supposed to be there!"

Startled into a split-second paralyzed silence I could make no reply. We both then turned to gaze upon the Red Horse Inn. There it stood, plain as a pike staff and as solid, a very material pile of stones and tiles. For a good two minutes we stood on one side of the rail-track silently noting every detail while the warm sunshine beat down upon us seeping into our bodies as if it would melt us up to become fused into those down bearing shafts of golden waves from the home of the LEO God!

GRADUALLY, from out of the aura of silence surrounding us, a silence caused in our minds by this sudden encounter with what seemed to Peter, the unreality of something existing that had by all standards ceased to exist, we became conscious of the warmth upon our backs; the drone of insects and the lazy chirping of birds. Reality came back to us and speech to Peter. We crossed over together to where the old hostelry offered a shady porch beneath the sign of the fighting scarlet steed. The inn was real enough, no phantom structure this, no ectoplasmic background imprinted with three-dimensional impressions from the past—or the future!

But my friend still seemed a wee bit puzzled and though he now admitted the existence of the house outside of which we stood, he smiled and nervously rubbed his chin as he said, "Believe me, Rob, this place gave me a real jolt. I had always thought that this old inn had been pulled down years ago, yet here it is. I cannot say that the Red Horse did exist, for it is here before us, solid, cool and inviting. The rampant red horse of the sign is part of the armorial bearings of the ancient Reckness family over at Ashenden Mansion, the ancestral home of the present baronet, Sir William Reckness."

Swiftly the unreal drifted from our minds and became absorbed into the predominating factor of this August day—the warm sun-drenched atmosphere around us. Anyway, we were parched, and as it was still before 2 o'clock went inside the one and only bar, a small square room, with a tiny fireplace, a heavy oak table, three oaken forms, two high stools and upon the wall over the fireplace a huge old-fashioned almanack.

Peter stepped over to the table and rapped hard upon the top to summon the landlord, for service. The sound of the raps echoed in my ears as the bar seemed to become alive with the after sounds zig-zagging and criss-crossing from, and to, each of the four walls. On one side a heavy door, closed and with a sliding hatch fitted into it about breast-high, gave access from the bar-room to the private parts of the house. As we awaited an answer to the summons the atmosphere of the room made itself felt. It was cool, very, very cool. So different was the temperature in here to that reigning outside, that I felt tiny shivers running up my back and isolated spots of chilliness forming about my body. One over the region of the heart; another at the base of the skull and yet one more upon the outside of my right thigh. There was something akin to the state of the air prior to a frosty night about the room, and a mildewy smell assailed my nostrils.

SUDDENLY the sound of hardwood crashing upon hardwood jolted my mental processes. "Go away!" said a quavering high pitched female voice and again came that ear-stinging cry, "Go away! We've no ale left!" So startled was I being shaken out of my momentary inner-reverie that I jerked my head upwards and backwards, instinctively, as if to gain every scrap of distance in view upon which to sweep my gaze for

some hidden danger. Then I saw, across the room, framed in the hatchway in the door the face of an old woman . . . nay, a crone . . . no, no, surely a witch so strange was the contorted face with its eyes blazing like the near-dead embers of a wood fire forced by draft into a high glow.

The face was lined and wrinkled and grey. Dirty-white hair straggled over the brow crushed by care. The thin nose quivered like a piece of rice paper and was about as useful to its owner, for the muscles had long ago ceased to function and air drawn in just drew the nose flat upon itself making breathing impossible. The poor old mouth, a mumbling line of leaden hue fringed with curling hairs rippled and twisted as if to gather strength for one more outburst. "Go away, Sirs! For the love of heaven leave this house . . . we have no ale . . . we have no more ale to serve!"

The crone sucked in a great breath and her eyes seemed to leave her face, hung at eye-level and jerked and danced and in them was such soul-stirring fear and anguish that they actually spoke to my amazed mind "Go away—go away—go away. . . ."

Then what followed happened so swiftly that it was but a blur upon the visual cortex of my brain. The death-like head of the crone was snapped back and the hatch door slammed into position leaving a blank door, a stunned silence, then, slowly the sound came.

First of all a dull beating like fast running waves pounding breathlessly upon a hard sea-beach while far out to sea the storm wind rustles and begins to live, gathering momentum for the final whistling scream before a plunging torrential hell is loosed from the back-cloth of the heaving, moaning deep. Beat—beat—beat!

The wailing, like that of an infant racked with pain increased in force. Gradually these sounds merged into appalling volume. My nerves seemed to be tearing apart, and as I forced my hands over my ears I saw Peter cross my vision, his hands clenched, eyes narrowed, jaws locked. He leaped for the handle of the closed door. As he did so the monotonous deadly beating ceased; the wailing cry ended abruptly.

Then followed a sound beyond the door like a half-filled coke-sack being flung down. A piteous cry throbbed into the air, but my friend never reached the door for it was flung open and a dreadful figure stepped into the bar, slapping the heavy door shut behind it in one swift movement. A being near seven feet tall confronted us, huge in body, pulsating with strength and inhuman-like vitality. The great pumpkin-sized head was completely bald. The bull-like face was flushed and traces of high anger still flittered over its surface.

A tangled red beard festooned the lower portions, while a large left eye wild and blood-shot fixed upon us. Where the right eye had once been there now was only a dark-grey socket for all the world like the entrance to some sombre cave alive with hidden horrors! This was our first meeting with the one-eyed host of the Red Horse Inn.

"Welcome, my gentlemen, welcome!" he bellowed, lifting his huge head and stepping all nigh seven feet of him into the center of the tap.

"Sit down my gentlemen, sit down!" As if obeying the order of some super-being both I and my friend did so, pulling up the two high stools and seating ourselves, one at either end of the great bare table. Then we turned to gaze upon our monstrous, though not quite loathsome looking host.

AS IF he mentally read the dual question of our eyes as yet unsaid by words, he roared at us, "Ah! that woman. She will be the death of me yet. Never was a man plagued by such a witch; such a blight; such a mad-pate! All the day she is worrying herself, harrying me, her oh, so devoted husband! All the time she is a little mad; sometimes very mad! Always she is trying to drive my customers away with her silly lies that we have no ale. This house has much ale; ale of the finest brew from richest malts and the finest of Kentish hops. Gentlemen! May God forgive, but sometimes I have to beat her! It is with sorrow and shame, my gentlemen, that I do it, but it is for her good—my good—the good of the Red Horse Inn, sirs and gentlemen! Ah! but I love her so very much, that I would rather beat her, hear her cries, than send her away from here

to fester in a cold cell in the mad-house over on Westwell Minnis hill!"

A large bulbous tear quivered upon the lip of the lower eye-lid of his red-streaked optic. It slipped off like some loathsome-lurking creature and coursed down his cheek losing itself in the red beard.

Our fearsome host wiped the back of his hand across the glistening eye, with his other hand he smoothed away an imaginary tear from the grey socket where once had been his right optic. He bent forward, placed his ham-like hands upon the rough top of the table to support his weight, and, swinging his head from side to side, so as to focus each of us in turn with his rolling eye exclaimed without more preamble, and as if his peculiar explanation of his treatment towards his wife wiped out everything that we had heard or witnessed: "And now my gentlemen, what will be your pleasure?" bared his yellow-brown fangs in a fierce smile and, before we could recover ourselves to tell him what our pleasure might be, cried with a loud booming sound, what our pleasure was to be.

"Sirs, a drink for each of my finest dark ale. Nectar it is! A brew for the high gods!" He vanished back behind the door and we heard him calling to the old crone beyond. Hardly had we settled ourselves before he lumbered in and placed two pewter tankards before us. His large goggle-eye swung about as he bid us drink, and informed us that he would await our further orders, after we had quaffed, and so he left us.

Peter and I drained our tankards, and I must admit the dark ale was the best I had ever tasted. All at once, something seemed to gripe my stomach, and I suddenly felt light and faint. I looked at Peter. A look of surprise and pain was upon his face and he clutched his hands over the region of his stomach. Good Lord! I thought—POISON! Then our host lumbered over to us. He leered.

"Well, my gentlemen, you have tasted an ale fit for the thirst of the gods, and now, thanks be to that special brew, you have appetites fit for the stomachs of the gods also!" He leered again. "In five minutes you'll have vittles to appease them, gentlemen, and two more tankards of that same nectar!" He swung his head, goggled his solitary orb and moved away, yet for all his bulk making no sound so cat-like was his tread. Once through the door we again heard him half-scolding half cajoling the old witch-like female. I looked across at Peter who pursed his lips. I asked him how he felt and he replied tersely, yet with a smile—"Damnedly hungry, Rob! How about you?" I nodded in agreement that I too, was just as hungry. I still felt terribly light. It was hunger induced by the appetite sharpening ale, the Nectar of the Gods of old One-Eye. As I sat impatiently awaiting the appearance of the "vittles" promised, and twiddling my thumbs for something else better to do, my nostrils caught the wafting of the musty odor again.

It seemed to be a mixture of rotted wood, crawling alive with wood-lice; of faint whiffs of the corpse-like smelling stink-horn fungus; of mildew eating away the winding sheets of the dead and the sickly effluvia of disintegrating muscles and gristle vainly holding together the slowly twisting bones of skeletons falling apart hidden deep in dark dells in old woods. There was something very fugitive about that smell. Rack my mind and memory as I could it eluded pin-pointing. I sniffed deeply. The voice of Peter cut across my thoughts.

"I can't smell anything myself Rob, but if it should be a earthy, musty kind of lesser stink, one oftens meets with it in such old inns as these, and in the older types of small farm laborers' cottages with their earthen floors and foundations bereft of damp-courses."

Before I could say a word, the door burst open and "One-Eye" came over to us carrying a great iron tray, a fine piece of workmanship, legacy from the days gone by, when iron-ore smelting flourished in Kent and Sussex. Then the great forests of the Two Wealds had died beneath the axes to help heat the furnaces, for the wood was handy to get and cheaper to burn than the black lumps of bottled sunshine, called coal, mined in the steaming Midlands, the bleak Yorkshire country and that vast black ocean of potential heat and power in fey-like Wales.

Upon this rare antique were two flowing tankards, a huge loaf of home-made bread,

a great wedge of white cheese, and a bowl of mixed pickles, which mine host set down upon the table as if it was a piece of thistle-down. "Fall to, my hungry gentlemen, fall to" he cried, and, slapping and rubbing his huge paws together, went out of the door and closed it shut, but leaving the hatch half-an-inch ajar.

Needless to relate we really did enjoy that simple repast, for the marvellous ale had really given us gargantuan if at first painful appetites!

WE SAT there, fully sated, and my eyes roamed over the little what there was to see, until something strange about the large almanack on the opposite wall caught my eyes. Just at that precise moment Peter whispered to me, "Don't look, but I think that one-eyed horror is peeking at us behind the doorway hatch!" I closed one eye at my chum and continued to watch the almanack. It was a millstone maker's, and bore the information:

Illustrated Almanack
for 1881 of Jas. Stoneknapper and Sons,
for the well-known Newcastle millstones.

That almanack had been there for forty years! The months from January to July had been cancelled out, and the 16th of August had a red ring marked round it. Suddenly it shot through my mind that this day was August the 16th also, but not 1881, but 1921! What a coincidence I thought!

A queer little convulsive thrill struck throughout my body and again I caught that mysterious odor, only this time it seemed more of a one-ness and made me think of sunshine streaming down incessantly upon a mudflat near the sea. The odor faded and a thought jumped into my questing brain; "Here Time as we know it is standing still as it has always been, only such Time does not—never has—existed, only the mutability of matter which savants call The Universe."

PETER'S voice spun across my musing: "He's cleared off now—I think!" I nodded, and got up and went over to the almanack. For all its forty years it still seemed smart and fresh-looking.

The only illustration on this record of the year 1881 was a panorama view of the Stoneknapper Works, at Newcastle. It was a plain black and white imprint lacking depth and with that peculiar timelessness that such old prints have about them: an aura of peace and silence.

Then my eyes travelled down to the date, that certain day's date, with the crimson circle enfolding it as if it would not let it escape as had the days prior to it, but continue to hold it prisoner in Time. Then, slowly, so slowly, because the presence of *it was so finely distilled I caught again* those suspended particles of decay sending a message to my sense of smell. Then it was gone!

I gazed as if hypnotized at the number sixteen in its little scarlet circle. I felt myself being slowly drawn towards it. No, not my material self but some faint spark from within the mind: an atom of life . . . quite possibly it was what constituted life itself in me.

Gradually the numbers one and six grew larger and ever larger! The crimson belt around them flamed brighter and expanded outwards as if being pumped up by high pressure air. The black figures became taller, widened until all was an abysmal blankness before me, while high above in a vault of heliotrope color the vast half crescent of a glowing red circle continued to expand. Suddenly I winced as a razor-edge knife sliced through my head; I could hear words. It was Peter speaking to me, his voice slashing across my brain. By some miracle I found myself normal and gazing intently at the old almanack.

My friend must have been following my gaze, and it seemed my thoughts when I had first looked at the date, for he was saying, as if by way of explanation; "One often comes across very old almanacks and farm-sale bills in these out of the way country inns.

"Ready to move off, Rob?" he queried. I nodded, and Peter called loudly for the landlord. Goggle-Eye stepped swiftly into view. My chum asked him the price of our meal, and was told. He paid the inn-keeper who swept the coins from Peter's palm in one deft movement transferring them to a front pocket in his breeches pocket beneath the none-too-clean apron he wore.

Then, in his great booming voice he cried, "If, my gentlemen, you should want beds tonight, if returning this way, do not forget that the Red Horse can offer you them and they shall be as satisfactory to your rests, as its ale—that delectable nectar of the Valhallian Gods, and its vittles are to the thirst and the appetite. Good-day, my great gentlemen, and may the spirit of the Sign of the Fishes give you good luck this day," and he nodded towards our fishing equipment piled by the doorway. "And now I must see how that scourge of my life is, my darling wife, my sweet little bird that is so queer in her poor pate. Always shall I cherish her even to her grave if the sign of her house wills her to leave me first . . . alone. Rather, my dear gentlemen, and handsome sirs, would I have Taurus gore me with his fatal horns, than have the swift arrow of old Sagittarius pierce her poor heart. Good-day, my dear sirs and gentlemen, good-day!"

He turned away, and Peter and I gathered up our piscatorial tackle and walked out into the golden sunlight of that glorious August day and set off along the rail-road track to the Old Clayhole.

THOROUGHLY rested and refreshed our walk to the fishing place did not seem so long, and feeling thus we revelled in the golden warmth of the day. As we neared the end of our journey the track curved away to the left towards where the brickworks and the kilns had once been. Crossing the rails with Peter and bearing right I suddenly came upon that almost legendary piece of water, the Old Clayhole of Chart Magna. Its microscopic atoms of white clay made it glisten like a vast expanse of mother-of-pearl and all around its margins drooped the green maythorn bushes. It was an oasis in this countryside of fissured earth, browned grass and listless caterpillar-riddled foliage of trees beyond its life-giving waters.

We selected a likely spot and began to fish. From time to time deep swirls out upon the pearly waters showed where fine large fish swam just beneath the sun-reflecting surface. It was a handsome piece of water, this small lake, quite a quarter of a mile long and roughly two hundred yards in width.

Though we fished steadily until six o'clock we did not get a bite, yet I felt happy and satisfied. The sun caressed me, warm scents played around my brain; the drying grasses, the dampness of the reed beds, the breath of the shadowy woods and the heavenly scent of the ethereal flower-heads of the meadow-sweet plants.

At a silent hand signal from Peter I drew in my line and we retired to the shade of a maythorn where we partook of tea; a number of ham-sandwiches washed down with some home-brewed cider. After this simple repast we again fished until the gathering shadows made it difficult for us to see the floats.

All at once Peter struck! A boiling swirl frothed in the darkening water and with the swift strike the fish must have leaped in line with the up-pull, for a flashing scaly body flew up, over, and plummeted into the sparse brown grasses back of where Peter stood. We rushed towards the twisting, threshing captive, a really fine roach scattering almost phosphoresecent droplets of moisture. I held the jerking fish while Peter got out the hook from the leathery upper lip. My chum was beside himself with excitement.

"What a beauty! Such shape! Never seen such a roach, and I've seen a few big ones caught."

Feverishly he got his small hand-scale from the haversack and stunned the prize so eager was he to weigh it. The fish wriggled a few times then subsided. He drove the hook of the scales into the jaw and held the little machine head high while I struck a match that did not even waver so still was the air. The sliding pointer on the scale pointed to six pounds! It was unbelievable! Never, until now, had it been thought that a fresh-water roach could achieve such a size!

PETER was jubilant. He put the monster into his moss-filled creel, and began to pack. He was getting ready to go. His long day had been crowned with triumph. For he was now famous among fishermen. I felt a pang of jealousy leap across my mind. I thought how like a victor to go off with the spoils, unthinking, unheedful of the defeated. A sharp pain stabbed at my temples and the hair on the top of my head prickled.

Deep black blood seemed to be pumping ink into my head—thump, thump, thumping away.

I caught a whiff of some decaying thing weaving through the dead-like atmosphere. "Oh, damn, Peter!" I thought. "Damn the darkening waters, too!"

Then Peter's voice spoke crisply. "Come along Rob, pack up, for fishing for today is over—it's too dark to see. Better luck tomorrow, old chap!"

My head was splitting, desperately chagrined I mumbled, "Go off and gloat! Go on! Leave me here. I'm going to fish even if I cannot see and have to cast by instinct!"

Peter remonstrated with me. Urged me to have a cooling rinse. Spoke of rest and bed and better luck on the morrow. I continued to fish on for about ten minutes until the pain in my head and the piston-like throbbing across my temples nearly made me sick.

Feeling very ill I shakily unscrewed my rod and wrapped it up in its waterproof case and stooping down picked up my creel and haversack and as I did so a great gout of pain flooded my head making me stagger forward and retch. Peter caught hold of me exclaiming, "Now steady, old lad! Let me carry your gear, and give me your arm till you feel better!" I thrust his helping hand away. "Oh, go to blazes!" I cried.

He struck a match and held it before my face. A look of grave concern was on his face as he spoke to me. "Look here, Rob, you look very, very ill. Maybe you've got a touch of the sun. Let's get back as soon as we can, then you can have some sleeping tablets and a good night's rest and in the morning pop down to see Doctor Smalldale for an overhaul and some medicine."

I really did feel ill; like nothing on earth! LIKE NOTHING ON EARTH? What a funny expression I thought. Thump—thump—thump, went my head, with sudden spasms of excruciating pain flaming through the brain. I heaved, retched, staggered along guided and half-supported by my friend. From time to time my nostrils picked up that tantalizing whiff of rottenness and decay. Gradually the pain in my head began to become a sound, until after a while it felt as if the gray-neurons were swinging round and round in some ever increasing rhythm, and a subdued howling noise took possession of the inside of my cracking skull! Then came that deathly smell again, but increasing in density until I seemed to be oozing it out at every pore on my sweating body.

The banging and howling inside my poor tortured head increased making me want to twist and turn and shake it viciously and all the while the charnel odor seeped up my nose. It drove down into my lungs and then spreading inwards permeated every fibre of my being, until I got the horrid thought that I was a corpse gradually decaying, yet with some form of after-death consciousness to understand my breaking up, cell by cell. I pulled up suddenly and stood rigid, and let out a scream that after a few seconds so frightened me that suddenly the noises in my head ceased and the inexorable thumping subsided. I was as cold as ice and shivering. All around was a very dark kind of twilight while overhead the night sky flashed its thousands of far-away other worlds.

THEN in the sable gloom I discerned a red eye gleaming. I felt the gentle pressure of my chum's hand upon my arm, and heard his reassuring voice: "Look here, Rob, there's the Red Horse Inn ahead with a light shining through the red curtains of the taproom. What say we stay the night there so as to give you a rest?"

The suggestion immediately appealed to me and I said so. I had over-strained myself. The long day, exposed to the burning rays of the sun, and my unlucky fishing, coupled with the supreme luck of my friend had undoubtedly upset me in some roundabout way that I could not understand. My legs ached horribly and my feet inside my boots swam in hot sticky acidity from perspiration.

"Yes, Peter, old friend," I said, "we'll put up at the inn. Lord, how I crave for rest, to get my feet and legs in a prone position, to let my poor old sconce lower itself into a soft pillow!"

"Good man!" exclaimed Peter, and we walked swiftly to the dim outlines of the old ale-house.

We reached the inn and went inside. It was ten o'clock. An oil lamp, shed-

ding its mellow glow down upon the table, now hung from a hook in the ceiling. Then the fearsome host of the inn was with us again.

"Welcome, my gentlemen!" he cried. "You do well to come here! Your supper shall be served—cold chicken, sirs—right here, at once, and," here he glanced around at us slyly, "enough of that delectable brew to wet your parched throttles. You do require beds for the night, my lovely gentlemen?" he queried. We nodded, "Yes."

He seemed beside himself with happiness that we accepted the inn's hospitality. I intimated to our host that I was not feeling any too good, and not to set supper for me, but that I should like a draught of nice cool water. He clucked-clucked, and rolled his red-rimmed orb. Came and stood over me like some huge fierce pre-historic fowl might have hovered with protective wings over its chick.

He went away and returned with half of a cold chicken and slices of home-made bread for Peter, along with a tankard of the Valhallian nectar to wash it down with. Before me he set a plate with several razor thin pieces of chicken's breast, the superb white meat, with a wafer-thick round of bread and a very small tankard of the wonderful brew.

Silence settled over the inn, my head was clearing. I was able to clear up the chicken, bread and ale, and felt good and very sleepy. Peter, who seemed famished, soon wolfed his supper and drenched it with the contents of his large tankard. Seeing we had finished Goggle-Eye now brought in a slopping small bathful of water and a rough towel and bade us wash ourselves while he prepared our beds. Peter splashed and sloshed water over his head and arms like an infant enjoying its ablutions. Somehow the water did not appeal to me. I was tired, terribly so, and all I now wanted to do was to stay the way I felt, ready to slump into the arms of Morpheus. Tomorrow would be soon enough to wash.

As I sat and watched my old friend luxuriating over the cool water and glinting soap-suds I could hear the inn-keeper scolding his poor old wife somewhere in the domestic regions beyond the door. The air of the tap-room smelt fresh and sweet and the aroma from Peter's soap made things feel more real than they had done all day. Then our one-eyed host was with us again, calling, "If you are quite prepared, my gentlemen, I will show you to your rooms."

He led us from the "tap" and up a flight of dark narrow stairs, going before us with a lighted candle set in a heavy brass candlestick. Arrived at the landing he pushed open a door on his right and beckoned us into the room, which we found to be a large one occupying the front part of the inn and overlooking the old railway line. Without more ado he set the candlestick on the mantelshelf and bade us, "Good night, my dear sirs. Sleep well, for the beds are comfortable and there is no noise hereabouts to disturb one's rest. I can assure you, that the toils of the day, combined with that drink of the Old Gods will give you rest you have never experienced and may never experience again!" He smiled as he turned to go and for the first time since we had met that day he seemed something more human than he had first impressed us as being.

His footsteps moved down the dark well of the stairway and then—silence, except for the tick of an old cuckoo clock fixed to the wall over the fireplace where its grimy face dully reflected the light from the candle's flame. All at once a peculiar sound came from the dark landing beyond the closed door; something that flip-flopped, flip-flopped, its way along. A gigantic toad could have made such a noise or a frog of unusual proportions. The foot-falls, as I conjectured they were, stopped when opposite our bedroom door. For several tingling seconds all was quiet, nothing happening. Then the cuckoo made a funny whirring, hiccupped and stopped! Again the silence and nothing else! The candle which had been burning steadily flickered, though no one had moved, and no night breeze had twisted in at the open top of the window, then was blown out as if by some unseen presence. The room was suddenly flooded by a darkness so deep that I could not see my friend within a few feet of myself. Even the window was but an indistinct shade of something not quite so abysmally ebony.

Peter fumbled for his matches and struck

one, and as he did so the room gradually was drained of the awful darkness, wisps of sooty vapor sweeping past us and out at the window. The candle was relighted and as the hot tallow spilled over, the flame sprang up very bright and friendly. I looked at Peter and he gazed with widening eyes over my left shoulder to the door. A faint click sounded, followed by a jerky creaking.

Turning I saw the door gradually opening and an almost skeleton-like hand, nay rather a claw than a human hand grasping the edge of it. Wider and wider it opened until, there, on the gloomy threshold stood, in a voluminous white gown—the old crone! Her eyes shone dully, and in their depths glowed little spots of flame like the redness of burning charcoal. Her lips moved spasmodically and we heard, as if from some great distance her poor cracked old voice: "Go away! Don't stay here. Go away, for Life's sake go on, and away! Do not stay here, sirs. God forbid that you should stay in this inn, this night!"

Her old eyes wandered round the room and with her arms outthrust, she called softly, "Blood! Crimson blood! There it is, dripping down the walls! Look at the ceiling and see the drops of rich red blood gleaming there, and dripping down—dripping down —like rain!" The old woman stiffened, every muscle flexed, only her right arm remained extended and with pointing finger she gazed beyond us. "Go sirs, please go! For there I see hanging in mid-room the black iron bar, with the name on it of one, written in flaming letters, the name of JOSIAH BENACRE!"

Swift as thought I swept my gaze around the walls, over the ceiling, across the plain-board floor but nothing could I discern—no blood, no black iron bar miraculously suspended twixt ceiling and floor. Then I swung my eyes back to the old crone as heavy footfalls crashed up the stairs, stamped along the landing and thudded to a stop by the ancient dame. There stood the inn-keeper with wrathful countenance and twitching beard.

Grabbing hold of his wife's right arm in such a crushing grip that I fully expected to hear the sharp crack of bone, he swung her for all the world like an empty flour sack about face and forced her beyond the doorway.

He then turned to us to say, "Never was a man with his living to make plagued by such a mad-woman! I am grieved, my gentlemen, that this crazy female, this once sweet bird of mine, should interrupt you with her lunatic speechifying at this time o' night. Let no more intrusions unsettle you, gentlemen. Lock and bolt your door against this human pestilence I hold in my hand, in case her dreams awake her in the silent hours and she try to worry and frighten you in your slumbers."

He thrust his crazy partner forward crying out as he did so, "And now to your room, Mistress Benacre! Let us have no more of this madness. To bed with you, and mind you stay in it or I will strap you down to curtail your midnight ramblings! Goodnight gentlemen! Sleep well!" and then he was gone with his witch-like wife. We heard his heavy footfalls die away and then came a silence so profound and deep that I could hear the blood in my veins as it coursed around my frame.

THE quietness drew my attention to the cuckoo-clock, and then I recalled how it had suddenly stopped. Looking down at my wristwatch I noticed the time—eleven o'clock. Just at this precise moment the old time-piece began once more to record the passing seconds with its slow tick-tocking, so I set the hands to the correct time. Peter, acting upon the advice of the host locked the door and bolted it top and bottom. Soon after this we were in our separate oaken beds. We had forgotten to blow out the candle on the mantel-shelf, and I lay abed gazing at the sentinel-like flame when a gentle snore from Peter indicated that the Goddess Morpheus had taken him to her restful bosom. Then my eyelids closed and the candle was forgotten as sleep enshrouded my tired mind.

I awoke with a feeling that someone was in the room! The candle still burned. The cuckoo-clock tick-tocked on into the night. Gazing over to the door I could see that it was still securely bolted top and bottom. I turned my head to look over to Peter and then a slight noise distracted my gaze. It

came from one corner of the bedroom where a startling thing began to happen! A large square portion of the boarded floor in that corner began to move up and swing slowly over until it was tied backwards secured by a rope from below. Then a large shadowy figure gradually erupted from the sable void beneath until it emerged to reveal itself as that of the one-eyed inn-keeper. A stab of fear pierced my mind and flowed over my body. I lay transfixed, yet instinctively closing my eyes until they were mere slits, as an animal or bird will do when shamming death from the hunter.

I observed our host gradually approach the bedside of my friend and look down at him as he lay, no doubt in his inner-mind, in some faraway land of dreams. Even now I cannot quite fix the action of the blow, for it came so swiftly, was so annihilating! One second the right arm of the inn-keeper was down by his side holding some object I could not fully discern, then he had raised his arm, in the hand of which I recognized a heavy iron bar about two feet long held in a grip of human steel. So time-defying was that upswung movement, pausing delicately for a fraction of a second at its apex until it swept down so fast that I could not follow the downward stroke that I had no time to call out a warning to my friend. Even if I had been able I sincerely believe that it would have been of little use at that precise moment when time stayed its forward movement of continuity through space. I heard the crunch of bone as the iron-bar ended its journey. Peter's sleeping face from the top of his forehead to his chin opened up and a chasm down the centre of his head became alive with bubbling crimson. The grey-matter of the brain, suddenly released from the skull flew out in streaks of glistening spume splashing into the contorted face of the murderer! He did not lift the bar out but withdrew it swiftly lengthwise and then he turned to where I lay not so many short feet away.

I was fully awake now, struggling to rise, but a thousand strong lilliputian threads of material life held me fast. My spirit in its agony did nearly succeed in wresting itself from the flesh but those threads held fast and I was helpless. Then the monster of the Red Horse Inn brooded over me and muttered, "He sleeps. My dear gentleman sleeps!" I saw the hairy arm swing up above me swift as light, until it hesitated for a split second before commencing its downward path of death! My body and my mind had become one solid mass of ice-coldness. I could not will myself to move a fraction, while a flowing movement inside me seemed as if my spirit had already commenced to project itself from my earthly frame now on the very threshold of material oblivion. My eyes caught sight of the candle flame which seemed to be growing taller and thinner like a sliver of steel and so acute was its brightness and thinness that it sliced right through one of my eye-balls severing the right to left swing of the optic nerve. The sudden pain jerked my head up partially and with my mind nearly insensible I saw the hands of the cuckoo-clock meet on the stroke of midnight. The imprisoned bird darted forth to make its first cracked call, as the day of August the SIXTEENTH, trembled on the line of the Present before becoming what we call the Past.

As that inane mechanical bird called out, the upheld arm of the murderer began to descend. All at once my arms were released into action and I threw them up in a momentary delayed reflex action. As the bird of the old time-piece commenced its second "cuckoo" the candle flame died, and my hands upheld before and beyond my hapless head bent inwards beneath a ruthless titanic movement. My head exploded as globes and stars, constellations, galaxies roared and hummed round and round in it a mad dance in limitless space. These gave way before exploding starless universes of flaming orange, seering crimson, and then all was blotted out by a blinding super solar heat-whiteness across which travelled heliotrope sine-waves, in a time-eternity as yet unborn. . . .

I WAS accused of the murder of my friend Peter Houndstone by killing him with an iron bar on the night of August the SIXTEENTH. The trial proved to be a magnet which drew to it the absorbed attention of the medical world concerned with the science of mental states. In the little courthouse, day after day, assembled a brilliant

nucleus of the leading stars in the neurological firmament. Why this was so I am not able to fully understand, for my statements at the trial about my movements and experiences of the SIXTEENTH of August were real, so therefore true. Evidence was brought forward on the authority of Sir William Stalisfield-Bowle, the well-known county chronicler, to tally with my story of the Red Horse Inn, the inn-keeper, and his wife.

Sir William stated that there had existed an inn called the Red Horse on the site where the body of my friend was found by the railway track. It was pulled down in 1890. A one-eyed inn-keeper of the name of Josiah Benacre had lived there, with his half-witted wife, until the night of August the SIXTEENTH, 1881, when he had murdered two sleeping travellers at the inn. He had then killed his wife. All three of the dead had evidently had their skulls crushed in by some very heavy weapon—presumably an iron bar, wielded with terrible strength and ferocity. Josiah Benacre disappeared, but was shortly afterwards apprehended as he was about to step aboard a vessel at distant Liverpool about to sail for America. The murder weapon could not be found.

Benacre was tried for his life, found guilty of the murders and hanged. Two doctors at his trial put forward the theory that it was quite possible that Benacre had suddenly gone berserk owing to the injury of his lost eye having after many years affected his brain and therefore his reason. Anyway, they hanged Josiah who, before he was cut off from life cursed whoever might find the missing murder weapon with which he confessed he had crushed in the skulls of his victims. The prosecution for the Crown quickly tore my strange evidence to pieces, for as the prosecutor said, the old inn had been out of existence for just over thirty years. The inn-keeper had been hanged and his remains lay several feet beneath the flagstones in the prison-yard nearby, while his wife rested in her lonely grave in the ramshackle churchyard in the old town below.

EVIDENCE showed that my friend and I had fought near some tangled undergrowth not a great distance from the site of the former Red Horse Inn. My poor friend's face had been smashed in and when found was nothing but a crimson mask from which his protruding eye-balls gazed upwards to the blazing sun in the blue sky. I was arrested for the murder at my own home at Molesden the evening of the following day. I had been puzzled as to why I was home, for I felt I should not have been there. My parents were away at the time, having gone into the neighboring village to visit some friends. Then the police had arrived, with detectives and a pair of bloodhounds. It was not until after the shock of my arrest and the police statement as to why, that I could recall events, though not one thing about the awful crime I was supposed to have committed. My evidence of the day's fishing trip sent the police to find my fishing gear. They soon discovered it, in the kitchen. There it was: the fishing rod, the haversack with hooks and lines in it; the bait can and the creel. And in the wicker-work creel, upon a bed of damp mosses they found—the six pound prize roach my friend Peter had caught in the early evening of that yesterday!

There was the motive, said the prosecutor. The giant roach. I had been jealous of my friend's triumph. Perhaps I had offered to purchase it from him so that I might be able to bask in the drone-like possession of that marvellous piscatorial specimen. Failure to buy the fish had then led to trying to get it by force. My friend had then tried to defend his prize, but had paid the supreme price, had forfeited his life to my greed and jealousy and as the blood of Peter Houndstone soaked into the thirsty soil I had robbed him of the day's prize.

The murder weapon, the very iron bar some two feet long and an inch and a half in thickness, which I had fallen over in the undergrowth on our way to the Clayhole, was shown at the trial along with the creel with the fish in it coated with an embalming mixture to arrest its too early decomposition. My finger-prints had been found on my chum's creel and upon the fish also. But these did not signify as the defense pointed out, for I had no doubt handled the creel, and without doubt the prize roach long before the murder had been committed. In fact had no doubt handled them shortly after

the catch had been made on the banks of the old Clayhole.

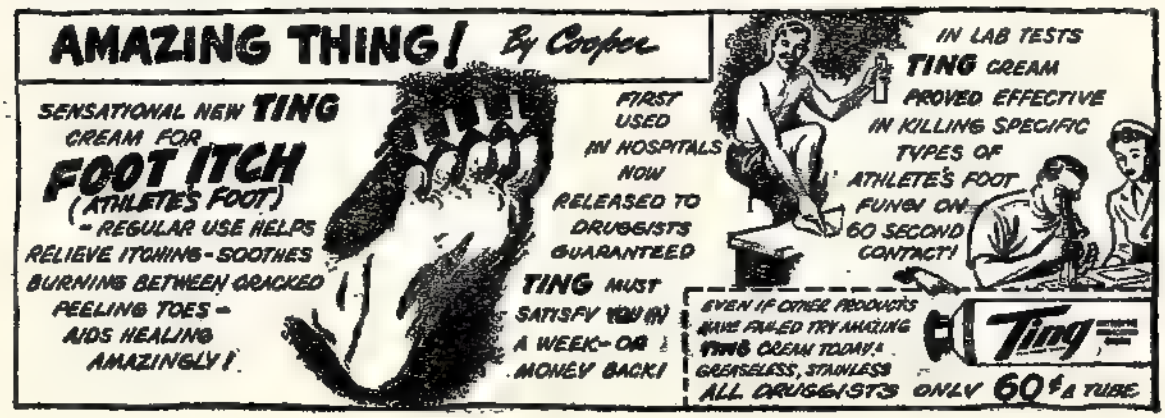
The iron bar, pointed out the defense, was devoid of fingerprints. Only because, responded the prosecution, on account of the entire surface being several millimeters thick with crumbling rusty iron which formed a covering of little more than loosely cemented brown dust. Science, called in on the part of the prosecution, showed that the iron bar had been handled the day of the murder. Had been gripped very tight indeed. Science, that greatest of all enemies to the criminal world, also showed minute specks of corresponding brown metal dust from the pores of the skin of my right hand, and from a septic spot deep down in the lower part of the palm a minute sliver of corroded iron was forcepped out!

As the soul-destroying days of my trial dragged by, the battle for my life took on new shape. It was the Crown and the Forensic Department lusting for my blood and the Defense and Neurological Science trying their hardest not to have that blood spilled. So fair are trials in this land that even one of our greatest physicists and mathematicians was allowed to propound in court in collaboration with the two doctors of psychiatry his Theory of Space-Time Recurrence Frequency. For he based my innocence upon his Einsteinish calculations of Time in Space and the mathematical exactness of the past recurring at set times in the Present.

Through this Theory the Defense pointed out that I had got the rust in the pores of my right hand and the sliver of iron while protecting myself in that last action when I tried to fend off the blow from the innkeeper as he aimed the iron bar at my head in the Red Horse Inn. The deadly Prosecutor especially remarked that my head had quickly recovered from that murderous blow! He went on to say that quite possibly the learned physicist and mathematician could also account for this phenomenon? It was possible, said that great mathematician, through a slight outward deviation of the Space-Time curvature moving outwards on its never-ending orbital journeyings.

Soon I shall be free. Free from the doubts, the torturing fears, the sleepless nights attendant upon my trial. As I stated earlier in this narrative, owing to my home being so far away and difficult to travel to, I cannot make a move until the morning, but now a very few hours away. At twenty minutes past eight in the morning, the hard tired car of the Albatross Bus Service will pull up in the old market square of this quaint town and await there while the driver-conductor delivers a few parcels to a nearby newsagent's shop, where they can be called for. Just on the half-hour he will collect the fares from the passengers and move into the driver's seat. As the clock over the crumbling town-hall chimes the half-hour he will let in the clutch. The gears will grind, and the racketty vehicle will move forward on its way to Forstal Green, Hawksden, Chart Magna, Thorneden, Witch's Cross, and my own village on the route . . . MOLESDEN!

Not until then shall I feel fully released and away on my journey for at that time precisely the Public Hangman will send me plummeting into space where I shall gently swing until I shall be medically assessed as having been hanged by the neck until I am dead!



A HABIT OUT OF HISTORY

by David Eynon

"I SAY, John, *that's* an odd looking tower," said Henry Parkinson to his host, as they traversed the edge of the moor. "Why, it's positively Druid. Whatever is it for?" It was twilight in the north of Wales and the two men worked slowly through the gorse until the shadow of the crude relic fell across their path.

"Ah? Ah, yes. Quite," said John, leading his guest from the path, stepping around the edge of the tower's deepening shadow. A last burst of sunlight etched the silhouette sharply on the rocky ground. "Druid. Definitely Druid."

"But it's in such excellent condition," marvelled Henry, with persistence. He al-

most thought he heard voices coming from the top of the tower, but the Welsh wind plays tricks on strangers oftentimes.

"Hmmn," said John, glancing back over his shoulder. "I. . . . ah . . . expect it's been kept up—or something." The two men had started down the hill, the shadowed side. Behind them the tower rose up against the evening sky like a scarred giant, its little slit eyes following their progress towards the valley below.

"Kept up? You don't say," Henry mused. "By whom?"

"A dozen monks," said John, halting at the end of their decline, breathing heavily.

"Really?" puffed Henry. "What in the world are they doing in a Druid tower?"

"Why, they're guarding the skull of a mad man," said John, quickening his steps as the manor lights came on one by one. They were soon inside the hall, with the butler taking their sticks and jackets. John led the way to the living room and port. The two men sat before a crackling fire. Henry waited until he could broach the subject again. His host beat him to the punch.

"I EXPECT you'll want to know more about it," John said, offering his cigar case. "One always prefers a warm living room and a glass of something, before starting off on a story of that sort—don't you agree?"

"Rather," said Henry, drawing on the cigar to get it well-started. "Of course, if it's something awkward—something you'd rather not discuss?"

"Oh no, not at all," said his host, waving out the match. "I'd have explained more back on the hill, but the darkness comes quickly here. Frightful mists—nasty for the lungs."

"Ummm," said Henry, partially in agreement about the mist, partially in accord with the quality of the port in his raised glass.

"I don't know the whole story, of course," John said, "but I gather it goes back no little time. I don't imagine you're familiar with Owen Glendothwyn, are you?"

"The mad king?" asked Henry. "A Welsh old wives tale, isn't it? Didn't ever exist, did he?"

"It's sometimes hard to say just who *did* exist, a thousand years ago," said John, peering into the fire. "You remember those expeditions from school," he said, referring to a series of archeological explorations which emanate so frequently from Cambridge. "Pemberton went on one, the year we took the bump from St. Kit's."

"Pity he ever came back," said Henry, remembering that Pemberton still owed him a fiver from boat night.

"Well," said John, "they were always discovering people who weren't, or hadn't been, or shouldn't have been. They rarely found traces of people who were supposed to be, don't you know."

"Pemberton found my fiver," said Henry, disgruntled by the memory. "He was devilish quick about that."

"I am not receiving the attention to which I am accustomed," said John with mock hauteur.

"Sorry," said Henry. He remembered the quality of the port, took another sip and was quite prepared to give up all hope of the lost money.

"Well, if you remember, Glendothwyn—even though a royal personage—was condemned as a sorcerer. Even now one can see any number of oddly shaped rocks around here that countrymen will assure you are people turned into stone.

"At any rate, he was beheaded—with due ceremony, of course—and the superstition arose that if his head ever managed to rejoin his body, all jolly hell will break loose." John stopped talking and reached over to pour his guest some more wine.

"Where's this body, then?" Henry asked.

"As a matter of fact, it's supposed to've been in the churchyard here. Not in Holy ground, exactly, but somewhere—no one knew where—on the premises."

"Your family chapel?" asked Henry, raising both eyebrows. "Not a relative?" he asked suddenly.

"Nothing like that," said John, smiling

at the thought. "Our madness stems from quite a different source. No, actually, my people came with William. The story goes that this house—and the chapel as well—were built by an ancestor, who was nothing much more than a tribal chief, I expect. He was also the central religious figure hereabouts."

HENRY looked at the thick walls and dark paneling of a later period, while his host poked in the fire.

"This whole place," said John, indicating the room with a flick of the poker, "was a monastery at that time. Which is one of the reasons, I fancy," he said candidly, "that we've had so little trouble."

"Owen's pursuers finally caught up with him here, at the upper edge of the county. My collateral ancestor was called upon to exorcise the body, I believe, after the beheading. Not a pleasant job, you can imagine. Those old boys believed in witches and what not—hardly pleasant for them."

"I should say," said Henry. "What happened then?"

"No one knows, quite. The family seated here," he said, waving his hand to indicate their present premises, "seems to have died out, for no especial reason. A century or two later people of my branch took over by default, as it were. The monks, I believe, were here when they came."

"The monks in the tower?" asked Henry.

"Exactly. The house was no longer being used as a monastery," John explained, "Again, for no good reason that I know of. The tower's guardians were imported straight from Rome, I believe. Members of a rather small order—can't think of the name, offhand, but no matter, you'd never have heard of them before anyway."

"And they're still there—the order, I mean—at the tower?" Henry asked.

"Hmmn," said John, reaching for the decanter. "Care for another?"

"Don't mind a bit," Henry said, quickly thrusting his glass forward. "Henry the Eighth must have mucked up that arrangement somewhat, I expect. The monks coming direct from Rome, I mean. Thanks," Henry added, settling back in his chair with a renewed glass.

"Welcome," said John, filling his own glass and stoppering the decanter. "As a matter of fact, he didn't. Quite likely the only thing he didn't muck up, though. This seems to have been a hands off proposition for as long as anyone can trace back. They still come direct from Rome, you know."

"Really?" said Henry. "Then the church must think there's something genuinely in need of watching there, mustn't they?"

"Possibly," said John dubiously. "I expect it's more a habit that hasn't been stopped. Some fluke or other. Orders probably taken care of in an obscure department of the Vatican that's not been looked into for five centuries or so."

"Like that chap who spends every weekend in the *Times* building with a suitcase of bullion, you mean?"

"Exactly," said John. "A habit out of history. After all, London's full of them. The Temple trumpeter, the guardsmen of Threadneedle Street—why shouldn't Rome have a few also?"

"I say, John," said Henry softly, looking up at his host with an earnest glance, "what do *you* think of the whole business?"

"Well, I mean to say . . . that is," John was taken off guard and struggled awkwardly to find a foothold. He stopped groping for a second and stared into the fire. The yellow glow splashed across his face, accentuating the lines around the mouth and making the eyes glow ever so little, giving him the look of madness.

JOHN flicked a glance at Henry Parkinson to make sure he was watching, then turned to the fire and spoke.

"Suppose, Henry, suppose I told you that the skull escaped—broke loose every time it wasn't watched—and that all hell *did* break loose on those occasions?"

"I see," said Henry quietly. "Then there is something to it, after all."

"Quite possibly," said John. "One's never sure of those things, of course. I've never even seen the skull, myself. Still, incidents have occurred."

"Has it . . . ah . . . ventured out recently?" asked Henry, studying the deeps of his port.

"I don't know," said John. "In my father's time it was said to have got loose once—

one of the monks fell asleep. They each spend an hour on guard, you see. That's why they have twelve—one for each hour of the night. Daytime doesn't seem to worry them."

"Tell me, was it possible that I heard voices as we passed the tower this evening?" asked Henry.

"Oh, that," said John, nodding. "At sunset and dawn they've got some sort of incantation. A ritual they took over from the Druids, I believe."

"And when the skull got out?" asked Henry.

"Oh, the monk was only asleep fifteen minutes or so when his relief came. The thing didn't get far—it was stopped in the road before the house, here."

"Tell me, was that in 1906, John?"

The host looked up, eyebrow lifted. "What makes you—?"

"I remember when we were poking around the churchyard. Those five stones—all the same date—May 5, wasn't it? Seemed rather a large number to have passed on in any *one* day in a sparsely settled country like this."

"Yes," said John, "it was May 5th. Poor devils. No one knows exactly what happened. I can guess why it happened, though. Their family went back to Glendothwyn's time, too, you see. I wouldn't doubt but what one of their ancestors had been the headsman in the affair."

"Good Lord!" said Henry. "Vengeance delayed a thousand years. Staggers the imagination, what?"

"Hmmn," said John. "Grandfather often spoke of the time when one of the monks slept a full half hour. The vicar found the skull at the door of the church. He never liked to speak of it, but I gather that they decided its body must be somewhere in the crypts beneath the building. The chapel's built on a Roman foundation, you know. We dug up some rather well-preserved pottery once, when the floor had to be reinforced. Also the head of some idol or other—Juno perhaps. It's in the Bodleian now, and I can't say I'm sorry at all."

"What happened then—in your grandfather's time, I mean. If it had a full half hour—and did so much in fifteen minutes—I mean, it must have been fearful, what?"

"No, oddly enough," said John, offering a fresh cigar to his guest. "At least, nothing we'd call fearful. It seems merely to have despoiled a grave of some sort. Not its own grave, to be sure. Possibly the central figure in the original trouble—a person with no descendants."

"Someone connected with the house?' asked Henry, looking around the darkened room which had begun to creak as the dampness of the fall night seeped into its timbers

"I don't know," said John. "It was all hushed up. A bishop arrived suddenly the next week, Grandfather said, and lots of religious mumbo-jumbo. I suspect they tried to improve somewhat on the Druid's remedy."

"And you've had no trouble since then," said Henry. "I should be glad of that, if I were you."

"Unfortunately," said John earnestly, "that's not quite the case."

"Really," said Henry. "Something on a national scale, I imagine, eh? I mean, he's rather run out of local enemies by now, what? Expect he'd take a crack at the English in general."

"One can't be awfully certain in those matters," said John, "but the time I'm thinking of was early in the war. The monks couldn't get 'replacements,' as it were, because of the blockade. I've no doubt the Church of England would have lent them a hand, but you know how touchy these religious johnnies are.

"One of the monks—probably in his dotage, poor fellow—died at the start of his hour. At least, his body was cold when the relief came.

"They had a devil of a time finding the skull, that time. Finally, though, some one with his head screwed on right led a party into the underground part of the church—when daylight came. They dug about for a bit until they found a skeleton back in the corner."

"Could they be sure it was his?" asked Henry.

"There was a ring worn around the edge of the skull—as if it'd been wearing a crown even after death. Oh, not positive evidence, mind. Still, the average skull, I dare say, doesn't have a groove around the crown.

"Then too, the skeleton was short several vertebrae. The last one in line—where it met the skull—was split neatly in two. Quite likely the work of the headsman's sword, I think.

"They took the skull back to the tower immediately—a party of local citizens—and deposited the remainder of the skeleton in the upper reaches of the Severn."

"Ah, then you must have seen the skull yourself, after all," said Henry.

"No, as a matter of fact I didn't," said John. "I was quite busy elsewhere that night."

"Elsewhere?" said Henry.

"Dunkirk," said John. "And he couldn't have done a better job of it, even if he'd had twice twelve hundred years to brood."

The Archive

by HENRY T. SIMMONS

THE mammoth Archive lofts in winter's gloom,
And vainly clutches the last, expiring light;
It stands enveloped in a creeping doom.
The soaring towers are frozen in their flight,
And lost is their ancient, lithic might.
O'er that huge facade is writ: Knowledge is Power—
But in those golden letters grows a blight.
Founded in the flux of a faithless mire,
The tottering Archive rules its vast and mutable empire.

The moles explore that Titan's corridors,
Forever snuffling for the Absolute.
They packed away their gems and locked the doors—
And lost the key to priceless loot,
Concealed midst dusty credos, confused and moot.
No buttress for that sagging wall—
A bitter price for losing precious fruit!
The Archive's terraced mass foresees its fall,
As a thousand, restless moles dissect the empty hall.

"Where to, Please?"

BY

L. SPRAGUE de CAMP and FLETCHER PRATT

"Where to, please—the past or the future?"

"SO THAT elevator fell down the shaft and everyone in it was killed," said Mr. Witherwax, reaching out as Mr. Cohan slid his third Martini across the bar.

"It probably didn't make any difference," said Mr. Willison, sadly. "He probably would have slipped on the bathroom floor next week and cut his throat on an old razor-blade."

"Oh, listen," said Mr. Jeffers, "if everyone felt that way—"

He was interrupted by the entrance of a character who plunged through the door so hard as to bang it back on its hinges, almost feverishly clutched at the bar, and said hoarsely: "Brandy. A double."

The bartender's eyes opened wide, pushing a couple of rolls of fat aside in the process. "Good evening to you, Mr. Titus," he said, pouring.

The man he addressed took a gulp, coughed, looked at the stuffed owl and around as though he were seeing the place for the first time. His clothes had spots of dust and mud, and he was badly in need of a shave. "It's still here," he said, as though talking to himself. "It's all right." He sipped, and seemed to pull himself together. "Mr. Cohan," he said, "have you seen Morrie Rath?"

"Not this week now," said the bartender. "Would you be knowing these gentlemen? This is Mr. Gilbert Titus; Mr. Jeffers, Mr. Willison and Mr. Witherwax, and isn't that a fine name to give a man?" Hands were shaken. Titus said, "Sorry if my hand feels moist. I've been through an experience. Better give me another, Mr. Cohan. But make it a brandy smash this time."

"What kind of an experience?" asked Jeffers. "More beer, while you're about it, Mr. Cohan."

"I don't know. I wish I did. That's why I want to find Morrie Rath in a hurry and check with him. Do you know him? Real estate man."

"I've heard of him," said Jeffers. "Isn't he the one who promoted that big Belleview development?"

"That's the one. With every house furnished complete, down to and including a TV set and a lot of chromium-pipe furniture in the living room. I think they're horrors myself, and they're certainly no good for my business. I'm a junk-dealer—antiques, you know."

He dug his nose into the brandy smash. "He wanted to show me how convenient these modern houses really are when they're lived in, so he took me out to a cocktail party at Joe Cox's. Do you know Joe? Well, anyway, that's where we went; Morrie picked me up right here at Gavagan's. You remember, maybe, Mr. Cohan."

"That would be the last I seen of him," said the bartender.

INDEED? Well, since you don't know Joe, I'll tell you that he's a good man with a cocktail-shaker. He kept plying everybody with his concoctions, and since there was a big enough mob present to keep the ball rolling and a big table loaded with snacks, nobody worried much about doing any more formal eating, least of all Morrie

and myself. I don't mean we drank our dinner, but we came pretty close to it, and the first thing we knew, we were the last guests present and Ethel Cox was saying something about trotting off to bed and leaving us to continue the conversation.

So we phoned for a taxi, and as it was a fine night, went outside to wait for it at the street. Joe Cox's place stands at the top of the big Belleview hill. We could look down through the trees and see the lights of the city in the distance, long strings in irregular patterns. I seem to remember that they put me in a slightly sentimental mood. I said, "I'd give anything I owned to see that view as it was a hundred years ago, and go down into the city and find it as it was then. They lived a more comfortable life."

This was more or less a continuation of an argument we'd had inside. Morrie said, "That's just because you don't know what it is to live without conveniences. I'd give anything I owned, including my soul, to see the place as it will be a hundred years from now."

It was a silly argument, but we were still at it when the cab drove up. It was an independent, not one of those yellows. I always like to look at the driver's name, and I noticed that the little card that has it was missing. But it sometimes is. The driver turned around till he was almost facing us—he had the most flexible neck I ever saw on a man, but the cap covered all his face except a long nose—and said, "Where to, please?"

I was full of my argument for the good old days, and still fuller of Joe Cox's booze. So I said, "The Barclay Hotel, please!"

"You mean Bedbug Palace?" said Morrie. "That old joint was crummy when they tore it down, six years ago."

"Crummy, my left foot," I said. "It was a monument. Abraham Lincoln stopped there on the way to—"

"Okay," said Morrie. "Have your joke, and I'll have mine." He tapped on the glass. "Make that the first stop, driver, and then take me on to the Lonergan Building. That's as far in one direction as yours is in the other. They won't get it finished for five years. Let's see, you paid on the way out, didn't you? I'll take care of this end of the trip."

I said no, he had paid for the trip out and thought so, too, so we argued about that for a while, and then got onto something else, neither one of us noticing that the driver had started out, just as though he knew exactly where he was taking us. I didn't notice anything until the cab pulled up, the driver turned his head around on that prehensile neck and said, "Here you are, sir."

I GOT out without thinking, and found that although the air up at Belleview was clear, there was a good deal of fog down here in the valley. I heard Morrie call, "Good-night, Gil!" Then the cab door slammed, and there I was, alone on the sidewalk. Then I noticed that the street was cobbled and the sidewalk was flagstones.

You see, as I said, I'd had quite a few drinks, and it wasn't until that minute that it occurred to me to wonder where the hell the driver had dumped me out. I turned around, and there right in front of me was the big familiar-looking porte-cochère, all ornamented with iron curlycues, with the letters reading "Hotel Barclay." Through the glass of the doors I could see a little light inside, enough to show that somebody was about, though there didn't seem to be as much activity as you'd expect at a big hotel.

I hesitated about going in. I knew as well as anybody that there wasn't any Hotel Barclay any more, and there must be something fishy about this deal. But I looked up and down the street, and couldn't make out anything but a couple of street-lights, dim in the fog, and there wasn't a sound anywhere. Besides, with the liquor, I was so groggy that all I wanted was to get into bed somewhere and solve any questions later.

So I put on my fighting face, as they say, walked up to the door of the non-existent Barclay, and pulled it open. Inside, by what little light there was, I could make out that I was in an ordinary hotel lobby, with chairs and tables standing around. The furniture was Early Victorian—mahogany, with heavy lines, thick legs and lots of curves, but without the carved foliage that came in during the late Victorian.

Across the lobby was the usual hotel desk, with a space for the room clerk and a wicket. On the desk stood an oil lamp, but turned

down way low, so that it only lit up the place very faintly. It stank, and I recognized the type of lamp; it was one of the kind they used to use for burning whale-oil. The only sound was a faint gurgle-gurgle, as though someone had had his throat freshly cut.

It gave me a chill until I realized that it was only the night clerk snoring, curled up in the farthest corner behind the desk, back of the cashier's wicket. I couldn't reach the clerk to shake him, but there was a little bell beside the lamp, and I jangled it.

The clerk shook his head a couple of times, stood up and said, "You wish something, sir?" He was a young chap, with his hair full of grease and little sideburns growing clear down the sides of his face. He was wearing an old-fashioned hard-boiled shirt, and a vest over it, but no coat, collar or tie.

I said, "I want a room for the night."

He looked me from top to bottom sort of wonderingly—it wasn't until later that I realized my clothes must have affected him the same way his did me—but he shoved the register at me, with an inkwell which had a wooden pen-holder attached to it. He said, "I can let you have Number 207 for seventy-five cents, or Number 311 for a dollar. That has a sitting-room."

It was too late to pull out now, and I was feeling so sleepy I didn't care what kind of a flea-bag this was, so I said, "I'll take 311."

The clerk looked over the desk to see if I had any baggage. "In advance, if you please," he said.

That was to be expected. I pulled a bill out of my wallet and handed it to him. He had already started to open the till for change, when he stopped, turned up the lamp and took another look at the bill.

"What under the canopy is this, eh?" he said.

"A five-dollar bill. What did you think it was?" I told him.

"Never saw the like," he said, and squinted hard at the picture of Lincoln. "Who's this?" He scowled over the fine lettering. "Uh—Lincoln. Oh, that Congressman from Illinois. Series of 1934. This wouldn't fool—Oh, I twig! A campaign dodger, ha, ha, ha, pretty cute!"

I didn't want to start an argument, so I said, "Somebody must have passed it off on me. Here." I took the bill back and dug around in my change pocket, where I was lucky enough to find a couple of halves. The clerk bounced them on the counter to see if they rang right, gave me a peculiar look, and picked up the lamp.

"Follow me," he said, and led me down the corridor, where we climbed up two stories to No. 311. He showed me in, handed me the key, lit a match that went off with a great flare and sputter, and applied it to a gas-jet. It gave only a little yellow flame.

"You know about that rule, don't you, sir?" said the clerk, jerking his thumb toward a sign tacked to the inside of the door. In big letters it said: DON'T BLOW OUT THE GAS!

"Sure," I told him.

He explained anyway. "You see, sir we get a lot of rubes that have never seen gaslight before, and don't know that you turn it out like this." He demonstrated.

"I know about it," I said, yawning, and handed him a quarter for a tip.

He looked at it and said, "Haven't you made a mistake, sir?"

"I don't think so," I told him. "Why?"

"But this is a quarter of a dollar."

"I know," I said. "It's for you."

"Oh, thank *you*, sir," he said, and went out.

I GOT rid of my clothes and climbed into bed; and the next thing I knew I was being wakened by a loose shutter somewhere banging in the breeze. The room was still dark because the shutters at the window had been left closed. I had the usual hangover thirst, and the only water I could locate had stood all night in a pitcher on the washstand, but I took a swig of that, and went over and pushed open the shutters. It was broad daylight—somewhere near noon, I would judge. As I looked over the city, I could see that something was undoubtedly fishy; no tall buildings; no autos, no nothing. Just like a damned set for a Dickens movie; and the actors in it were wandering around with the women in big long skirts and the men in cutaways and straw stovepipe hats.

This was somewhere else; or rather, some-

time else. While I was dressing, I tried to do a little figuring. I know all about those stories where a man gets thrown backward in time and settles down to make his fortune by inventing the multiplication table or something like that. But they're fiction, and written by people it never happened to. That demon taxidriver had taken me at my word and delivered me to the Barclay in its heyday, and here I was, in outlandish clothes, with a pocketfull of money dated far in the future, and no prospects. I would not know how to put an electric light together if I had the pieces, and a telephone is a mysterious act of God; the only thing I understand is antiques. Besides, I have a family and I like them. I wanted home.

In the meantime, I thought it would be worthwhile finding out what date I was in; I was hungry and didn't think a shot would do me any harm. Going out didn't appeal, but a rope came through the wall with a tassel on the end of it and the legend PULL beneath. I pulled; and then sat down to count my resources. None of the bills were any good, of course, and the Lincoln pennies and Roosevelt dimes were just as bad. That left me with one more half-dollar, three quarters, a couple of Liberty dimes and six of the Jefferson nickels.

It wasn't very much. When my ring was answered by a chap about the same age as the night clerk, with a thin fringe of red whisker around his chin, I told him I wanted a newspaper and asked what the hotel charged for lunch.

He said, "Oh, we have the American plan here. You'll find it quite a bit different than in England, Mr. Titus."

I said, "England?" rather stupidly.

He smiled. "You mustn't think we Americans are rubes, Mr. Titus. Mr. Baker, the night clerk, told me you were an English millionaire."

I SAID, "Oh, all right. Bring me a bottle of whiskey along with the food," and recklessly handed him one of my remaining quarters. My spirits took a jump. I had noticed what seemed to me a slight accent in the voice of the night clerk, and now in this chap's. They had apparently caught the difference in my speech, and between the clothes and the quarter tips, it caused them to set me down as an eccentric and wealthy Britisher. If I didn't push matters too far, this would be a big help.

The bell-boy was back in a few minutes with a tray that held enough food to give a lion indigestion—a cut of roast beef, a cold chicken, a big slab of cheese, bread, and a whole pie, beside a pot of chocolate and my bottle of whiskey. I sat down in front of them with my newspaper. The date was 1859, and the headlines spoke of things like ATTACK ON COLONEL HOFFMAN'S ESCORT BY THE INDIANS, and the Sickles trial with ARGUMENT ON ADMITTING EVIDENCE OF ADULTERY. I also remember something about a DISTRESSING CALAMITY AT HOBOKEN.

AFTER I had eaten as much as my stomach would stand for I got the whiskey open and tried a snort. Man, that was strong stuff! Nothing like your modern blends, but pure corn that went down my throat like a torch-light procession. I sat there with it all afternoon, nursing it along, reading my newspaper, and occasionally taking a bite to eat. But I still wanted to get back, and though it didn't seem quite so important any more, from time to time I'd give a thought to that problem, too.

By and by it began to get twilight outside, and from the window I saw a lamplighter coming along the street. He had to stop once for one of those queer, high-seated cabs, and I had an inspiration. I rang for the bell-boy and told him I wanted a cab—not any cab, but one that would take me to Gavagan's Bar. He trotted off, and must have been gone half an hour. When he came back, he looked a little anxious.

He said, "There's only one driver who says he thinks he knows where it is, sir. But he says it's over on the East Side."

"What of it?" I said.

"There are a good many blood-tubs around that section of town at night, Mr. Titus."

"Oh, I don't think they'll bother me," I said, principally because anything was better than sitting there, and picked up what was left of my bottle of whiskey.

The cab-driver was certainly a character to make one think twice, and not in the

least like my driver of the night before, as I had hoped. As he leaned down from that little seat in the back, I saw he had a broad, heavy face with red blotches on it. He said, "So you're the English lord that wants a place called Gavagan's?"

I said I was and got in. It had begun to rain by this time, and it was very dark. There was no one on the street, and as we went along, it got still darker, because my driver was taking me into a section where the street-lights were farther apart. We were in a tough section of town, all right; I heard a scream come out of one house, and we kept passing saloons.

Finally, he pulled up at one of these places. "Here we are, lord," he said. "That will be twenty-five cents."

It didn't look the least like Gavagan's to me, but I got out, handed him the quarter, and stepped up to the door, thinking that if one transformation scene had been worked on me, this might be the occasion for another. As soon as I opened the door I saw my mistake.

There were three or four roughs drinking at the bar, who looked around as I came in. "Here he is, boys," said one of them. "Come on." He picked up some kind of cudgel that had been lying on the bar and started for me.

I slammed the door and ran, with them bursting out behind me. I don't know where I was and didn't know in what direction I was going. But I cut around corners a couple of times, gained on them, and after a while lost the sound of feet in the rear. The sidewalks were made of wood planks when there were any, and they were in bad condition. I stumbled several times, and I don't know how long I walked that way before I saw another cab standing at a corner under a street light. The driver's face was muffled up to his plug-hat.

When I said, "Is this cab taken?" he merely shook his head. I got in. "Where to, sir?" he said.

I said, "Hotel—no, take me to Gavagan's Bar." And that's all the story. Here I am.

TITUS finished his brandy smash and his eyes suddenly focussed on the leaf-a-day calendar behind the bar. "Holy smoke!" he said. "Is that the right date?"

"It certainly is," said Mr. Cohan.

"Then I've spent over a week on that day back in 1859. I've got to do some telephoning quick."

He was back from the booths in a couple of minutes. "My family's all right," he said, "though they did have Missing Persons looking for me. But Morrie Rath hasn't been home. I guess he hasn't got back from the Lonergan Building in the future yet."

Willison said, "I don't think he'll be back. Did you see this?"

He produced from his pocket a newspaper, and pointed to a headline. It read:

LONERGAN BUILDING NOT TO RISE
Commissioner Revokes Permit; Calls it Traffic Hazard
PROMOTERS ABANDON PROJECT

. . . the engineer in very fact saw the hurtling fate of the train ahead.

The Phantom Express

BY H. THOMPSON RICH

ONCE, twice, three times the station-clock's thin steel minute-hand had traced its monotonous circuit. Over in a corner of the big room several tired itinerants sat half asleep. From behind the barred ticket window a telegraph instrument talked fitfully. Elsewhere silence, save when the main door swung narrowly to admit an occasional overcoated, sleeted figure—and a squall of zero air. The Transcontinental was late.

Boom! Out of the dark came a dull epic of sound. Boom! It spread through the air like fog. Boom! Twelve times, till the night was saturated with muffled reverberations.

Hardly had the last lifeless echo faded, when a series of piercing shrieks announced the long-awaited Transcontinental. A moment later she rolled into the shed, steaming and sheathed in ice.

Engineer Hadden stepped wearily from the cab and swung off up the platform, chafing his chilled hands together. The stationmaster ambled out to meet him, throwing shadowy circles from his swinging lantern.

"Open track ahead, Hadden. Orders to hit 'er up!"

Behind them the passengers were piling aboard. Hadden half turned.

"Dangerous business, hitting her up this sort of weather," he muttered, "but orders are orders!"

He climbed back into the cab. When the signal came, he opened the throttle.

Swiftly the Transcontinental slid out of the shed.

Then he looked at his watch. It read 12:05.

"A straight stretch for eighty miles!" he exclaimed, and let her out.

The locomotive rocked and leapt ahead—now forty, now fifty, now sixty miles an hour.

"Mike!" he yelled, and the wash of air whipped the words back into the fireman's

ear like pistol shots. "Mike, we make Mansford by 1."

"An hour?" screamed the latter. "An hour?" Eighty miles? Man, yer dreaming!"

"Maybe I am," said Hadden grimly, giving her another notch.

ON INTO the night they rushed, faster and faster, till it was all O'Connell could do to keep that dancing devil of a steam-gauge needle up to where it belonged. Stripped to his red flannel shirt, he stood in the lurid glow of the fire-box stoking like a madman, while the ground reeled and swayed beneath him and the sky hissed dizzily over his head.

Firm on the little cab seat sat the chief, gazing fixedly ahead. He was tired and cold, and he thought how comfortable his little home would be, at the end of the run. He pictured Mary, his wife, waiting for him at the door—then the steaming supper—then sleep.

He yawned. He nodded.

On and on they roared, up grades, down inclines, over trestles, leaving behind them a long unbroken ribbon of echoes.

Suddenly Hadden jumped and rubbed his eyes. Then he stiffened and peered into the dark ahead—and saw a long, straight line of racing lights.

"Another express, not a mile away!"

"Mike, for the love of God, look!"

"Look where?"

O'Connell looked.

"I see nothin'!" he shouted back.

"You see what?"

"I see nothin'!"

"Then look again!"

O'Connell looked again.

"I see nothin', I say—nothin' at all!"

"Michael O'Connell," muttered the engineer, "you're a liar!"

They pulled into Mansford on the stroke of 1. Hadden watched the other express disappear into the dark ahead, and climbed angrily from his cab. He had been assured an open track. He would see what they meant by blocking the Transcontinental.

But the stationmaster knew of no train ahead.

"I tell you, your track is clear," he repeated, "open and clear to the end of the run!"

"You can tell me and be damned!" swore Hadden. "I tell you it's not!"

Suddenly he climbed back into his seat. It was 1:05.

"We'll make it by 2," he said, opening her up. "God, I'm tired!" Dark again—and suddenly the other express loomed up ahead, a ghostly vanguard.

O'Connell looked once more.

"I see nothin'—nothin'!" he exclaimed. "Forget it!"

"All right. Shut up!" sighed the chief, and was silent.

NOW they entered Cleft Forest Valley and went thundering down a steep incline, filling the precipitous places with their clamor. And all at once, following with haggard eye the phantom express, Hadden saw it dive over a dizzy trestle, saw it shudder—saw it leave the rails and hurtle down, down, into abysmal darkness and utter destruction.

Then, like a man suddenly roused from a trance, he awoke to the horror of the situation. In an instant he did a dozen things, and O'Connell clung desperately to a stanchion while the swaying locomotive steadied itself to a grinding, jolting stop—just twenty feet from the yawning brink of the bridgeless chasm.

"The trestle must have been swept away by the storm—we're right at the edge of the gulch—it's a miracle—the engineer is all that saved us," came from the breathless crowd that poured out of the cars and collected about the scene.

Later, when Hadden and O'Connell were brought before an investigating committee they had nothing to say, and took their reward in silence.

And there the matter rested.

SA'ANTHA

by

E. Everett Evans

Suddenly he remembered the words of call that would bring the spirit of the woods to him again.

THE humming tires sang a new song as the big sedan was turned into the graveled sideroad leading to the old homestead. They awakened old echoes in the benumbed, deadened mind of young Jon Maryth, and he roused a bit.

"Will this be the joyous homecoming about which I've dreamed so many years?" his thoughts questioned, "or is life over for me, with no hope of joy left?"

He knew a slight sense of guilt at coming back, seeking, so quickly after the untimely death of his parents in that terrible train wreck from which he had so providentially escaped. But his *need* was so great . . . his *beliefs* as strong as ever.

"But it cannot be," he thought almost savagely, "that Lachesis is such a cosmic jester, to spin so sorry a tapestry for me. Those tangled threads must have a meeting again!"

The xylophone-rattle of the car crossing the plank flooring of the well-remembered little covered wooden bridge again roused Jon from his memories, and he sat up quickly to peer through the car window.

And there—there in the swiftly nearing

Heading by Joseph Eberle

distance—was the great stand of timber—the Big Wood. There came a lightness, a sense of joy and complete happiness in his heart for a brief instant . . . then doubt forced it away.

Would She be there? It had been so long. But She *must* be! He knew it was a true memory, not a childish delusion as his parents insisted and which, since he refused to admit their claims, had led them to move to the distant city so he could forget as he grew older.

As though he ever would, or could, forget *Her!*

"It won't be long now, Honey," Mammy Martha's kindly old voice broke into his reflections, "but I still think it's wrong of you to come back here like this."

Jon Maryth grunted in annoyance even as Uncle Girard spoke sharply to his wife, beside him in the front seat. "You hush, now, Mammy. 'Member, we promised Mister Jon not to say anything 'gainst his wishing."

Sight of the big old New England farmhouse brought such rush of memories that Jon's frail body shook with emotion. For the moment he forgot even his purpose as pictures of the happy times with Dad and Mom here came welling into his mind, filling his eyes with tears. For he had loved them so much, and the ache of their passing was heavy on his heart. He knew, now, that they had acted in good faith and for what they thought his best interests in taking him away. Oh, if they could only have *believed!*

Much as he desired to go to *Her* at once, Maryth knew he was farr too weak to make the attempt after this long automobile ride. He was thankful for Uncle Girard's strong arms that almost carried him up the broad, winding stairs to the well-remembered room, and helped him undress and get into the old four-poster bed.

While the two faithful old colored servitors scurried about unpacking and righting the long-unused house, Maryth lay quietly, his eyes seeking out the old curios and keepsakes in the room. A long hour dragged its slow seconds past him without his moving. He lapsed into that curious sort of trance that is neither waking nor sleeping, and memory dug back into his boyhood here on the farm.

One special day nudged itself into clearer picturization.

IT WAS one of those warm, lazy summer afternoons in the country when the whole world is taking a siesta. Only the little things, such as bees, ants, butterflies and small boys, were active.

Young Jon Maryth, in knickers and blouse, head bared to the tanning sun, idled through the clover field, on his way to the Big Wood, his favorite playing place. His bare feet *squilched* in the dust of the field. Occasionally he broke off a sprig of fragrant clover between his first and big toes, bringing it up to his nose to smell, while standing balanced acrobatically on one leg.

There was a cool mustiness to the Big Wood that he loved. The leafy canopy of boughs kept out the burning sun, the still, mossy paths between the trees were all roads leading to romantic places.

He stopped at the slippery elm tree to cut off a piece of the savory inner bark which he chewed as he ambled along.

His mind drifted into the spinning of tales of high adventure in the Faroff Lands, as his feet slowly bore him towards the little, bubbling spring in a clearing he knew, near the center of the Wood. The water there, always cool and sweet, would taste so good on this hot summer day.

He was almost upon the spring when he saw *Her* sitting a little way from it, dabbling her naked feet in the little rivulet that carried the overflow away from the spring-pool.

Jon stopped short, then jumped behind a great spruce, his head cocked so he could peer out from behind his hiding place, to see without being seen. At first he could see only that it was a woman, dressed in some sort of a leaf-green robe, of some filmy material he did not know.

She did not seem aware of him, was relaxed and carefree. There was a peculiar sound in the air which the boy soon identified as a trilling hum that he knew she was making. A lilting little song of pure joy, without words nor need of them. It made a happy little thrill run all through him.

Carefully he crept nearer, edging his way from tree-bole to stump to bush. Final-

ly he was not more than a dozen feet away. Ordinarily shy in front of strangers, he wanted desperately to see her face. He could not have told why. Women, as such, did not interest him, except his beautiful mother, and genial old Martha, his colored Mammy.

But he felt a strange, urgent desire to see this woman's face. He wished she would turn, yet was afraid that if she did she would see him and make him go away. He didn't know who she was or could be. He had never seen anyone here before, certainly not anyone dressed like that.

Why'd she wear such funny clothes, he wondered? But they were kinda pretty, he decided.

THEN, suddenly she did turn her head, and he caught almost a full view of her. A gasp of surprise escaped him at the piquant beauty of that heart-shaped face with its little pointed chin, so different from any other he had ever seen.

At that gasp, slight though it was, she leaped to her feet in one graceful motion, stood poised as though ready for instant flight, glancing quickly all about. Almost at once she spotted him, stood looking at him, at first half-afraid, then puzzled, then with a friendly smile as she saw but a small, bare-legged, tousled-haired, astonished boy.

"Hello, Human," she said, and he wondered briefly at the wording.

"'Lo," he replied, sidling nearer. Then, after a long pause, he blurted, "you're pretty."

She smiled at the compliment, turned and sat down again with the most graceful ease he had ever seen. She beckoned. "Come, sit before me. The water is cool on one's feet."

When, as dusk was descending, he heard the distant clangor of the supper bell, he reluctantly rose. "I have to go now, Lady. Can I come and see you again, and'll you tell me more stories about those Old Ones?"

"Of course, Boy, I want you to come and see me often." Her hand caressed him with a curiously sensitive touch, from which he broke away to race back across the fields, bursting with his tremendous news.

At the table he spilled it out in a spate of words that came so swiftly his parents could not at first even understand, and forced him to calm down a bit and talk slower.

Again he told about the wonderful Beautiful Lady he had met in the Big Wood, how kind She was, how thrilling the tales She told him.

He only half-noticed the puzzled glances Dad and Mom exchanged as he talked, but gradually their faces lightened. When he finished Dad threw back his head and laughed uproariously . . . and Jon knew a sudden sinking sensation. Why, Dad had *never* laughed at him before. He sank deep into his chair, the hand holding his fork hesitated, then laid it down again, the piece of roast untouched.

"You fell asleep by the spring, and dreamed it all, Son," Dad said, and Mom added, "It's from some old story you've read."

"But I wasn't asleep and I didn't dream it," he insisted. "I wasn't even up to the spring when I first saw Her, and She was too real and we did talk all afternoon," and again that hurt feeling when he saw they did not believe him.

Rather, they talked earnestly about the impossibility of such a happening, and after awhile, so plausible were their words, and so much did he trust them, there came the first tinges of doubt and he went to bed wondering if it might not, after all, have been a dream.

To the young man now remembering, there seemed to be something he could not quite recall. It seemed to have to do with words, with important words he had forgotten. Nor could he wring further remembrance from his ill mind. . . . . .

But the next day, unwilling to disbelieve what he was so sure was truth, he hesitantly ventured back to the Big Wood again, and there at the spring he found Her once more, waiting for him to come, trembling with anxiety lest he fail Her.

Sitting by Her side beneath the great oak, he told Her of his parents' disbelief, of their mocking laughter.

"It is always the way, Boy," she said sadly but tenderly. "Only those with the Spirit of Youth within can ever see or know us." And when he did not understand, She turned the matter aside by beginning another tale of the Long Ago.

That night he again tried to persuade his parents about the realness of his Beautiful Lady, but they still would not believe, and at last Dad became angry with him for the first time he could remember, and sternly forbade him talking about it ever again.

But it is not in boy nature to keep silent, and he talked, over and over, and more and more he met with antagonism, harsh words and even whippings.

Still Jon managed to see Her almost daily, and had it not been for Her comforting love and sweetness, the boy felt he would die . . . or run away.

The coming of Winter and the deep snows made it impossible for him to go to the Big Wood to meet Her, and as the weeks sped by he ceased talking about Her, much to his parents' relief.

But never, for even an hour, did he forget.

Anxiously he waited for the snows to melt, and the first warm Saturday morning of Spring he ran at top speed back to the spring in the Big Wood, and there he found Her again, and their happy hours together resumed . . . while the hours at home grew more troubled.

ONE day there had been a stranger at the house, who had talked with Jon for hours, asking all sorts of silly questions.

Then, a week later, Jon Maryth was ordered into the car with his parents, and soon found himself on a train, and at last in the new home in the distant city where he was to live until this recent, sudden death of his parents released him to return to the beloved farm home.

But that distance had not made him forget, as his parents had hoped. The crushing blow of his forcible separation from his beloved Beautiful Lady—without even a chance to say goodbye or tell Her he was being taken away—made him sullen, brooding, his health undermined by the weakness and despair of his spirit. Now he was invalid, although he could get around to some extent if he did not exert himself too much.

Yes, Jon Maryth remembered that first meeting so well. Remembered, too, the countless others . . . and all they had meant to him. How She had. . . .

UNCLE GIRARD interrupted his daydreaming just then, coming with a tray heaped with tempting viands Mammy Martha had prepared to tempt his never-too-good appetite.

As he picked at his food, the noise of the countryside symphony tuning up for its evening concert was borne through the open window on the gentle evening breeze. He heard once more with delight the violin-pizzicata of the crickets and cicadas, the strident oboe-tones of the tree-toads, the booming bassoon-notes of the bullfrogs in the little pond behind the big barn, the drumming rumble of ruffed grouse from the distant Wood.

Immediately after breakfast, in spite of protests from the loving two who did not think he was strong enough either for the long walk or the emotional excitement, he started out. Past the back of the house he went, past the creamery and the big barn, walking slowly but purposefully down the cow-lane towards the fields.

As he ambled through the sweet alfalfa, revelling in the sights and smells that brought boyhood closer every second, Jon Maryth considered that perhaps it was good to be alive after all; that perhaps there still was something to live for.

Especially since he would see Her in a few minutes.

At last he reached the edge of the Big Wood. How familiar it was. Ah, there was the path. Well, hiya, old Shagbark Hickory! Long time no see . . . hello, Walnut, have to come get some of your nuts this Fall . . . and my pretty twins, the Silver Poplars. Beautiful as ever, aren't you—and as proud of your beauty . . . good old Mister Slip'ry Elm; got to have a piece of your tasty bark.

Deeper, deeper into the cool loveliness of the well-remembered place, past all his old familiar tree friends, Jon Maryth went with quickening pace, an inner excitement seeming to bring back his youthful strength. And there, just ahead, he spied the little spring.

"Lady! *Lady!*" he shouted then. "It's Jon, come to see you again! Where are you, Lady! Are you glad to see your little Jon again?"

He was at the spring now, still calling, looking eagerly all about, expecting every

moment to see her come running down an aisle between the great trees. In his mind's eye he could see her again so plainly, each line of her slim, willowy figure . . . the long, flowing hair the color of young brown bark . . . the pansy-violet eyes with their lights of laughter and love of life and wisdom. It was so he had first seen Her, clad in flowing, leaf-green robes; it was so he had seen her almost daily for a year and a half, except during that winter.

"Lady! Beautiful Lady! Hurry! It's Jon!"

In his excitement he peered about, running now this way, now that, seeking her.

But she did not appear, nowhere could he see her.

Alarmed and worried now, he rushed through the Big Wood, calling aloud anxiously, seeking her in its remotest depths, yet every few moments running back into the clearing by the spring, to see if she had appeared there.

His legs failed him at last. He sank, panting, onto the mossy bank beneath the big oak by the spring. It couldn't be that she had moved away.

She *belonged* there, he knew. For he knew now what she was, why she fitted so naturally into this woodland scene.

His face blanched and his breath stopped at a horrid thought. Dead? Oh, *no!* It simply was not possible. Not his Beautiful Lady, so much alive that she seemed life itself! No, he must not—*he would not*—believe she, too, had thus been torn from him. And yet, when he examined it, he could see that the great oak was past its prime, that in many places it was rotted and with many dying branches.

Stupored, he turned and threw himself at full length, face down on the soft, sweet moss, crying his despair, his disappointment, his need of her.

Try to forget, the wind whispered in his ears and in his mind. But he could never forget the vastness of his loss. Not remember Mom's sweetness, her loving tenderness and her care; not remember Dad's flashing, scintillant mind, his usual good-humored steadiness; not remember his Beautiful Lady's entrancing face and vibrant form, the wonderful tales she had told him of people and events when the world was young; the many things about Nature she had taught him with a clearness he had never been able to comprehend about the things he had merely studied in school?

Foolish wind, to counsel him thus.

A swift encroaching fog of blackness enveloped and blotted out his every sense.

JON MARYTH came back to full consciousness to discover himself lying in his own bed, with the late afternoon light showing through his window. "What th'?" he muttered, and tried to raise up but found himself unable to do so. He wondered how long he had been sick this time, to get that weak.

He turned his head on the pillow, saw several half-emptied bottles of medicine on the little table nearby, that told their own story.

"Mammy!" he yelled, and was surprised how weak and small his voice was. But she must have been near and heard him even so, for in a moment she came bustling in, beaming.

"Oh, Mister Jon, it's so good to see you awake again and looking like you knew what was going on," she cried as she came to his side and stooped down to kiss him.

"How long have I been sick, Mammy?"

" 'Bout eight days, Honey. Uncle Girard and the farm man found you out there in the woods, burning up with fever, late that night when you didn't come home. We was mighty scared for three, four days, but ol' Doc Fergerson he said he'd pull you through all right, and praise th' Lord, he shore did."

"Well, I'm still awfully weak, and mighty hungry. Could I have some broth . . . or something?"

She laughed happy assent, as she went to the door and hollered to Uncle Girard to "bring Mister Jon some of that soup!"

While he was sipping it, the two old servants watching him in fond joy, told him something of his illness, and that for a couple of days he was really out of his head.

"Can you remember what it was you wanted, Honey?" Mammy asked anxiously. "You seemed so almighty worried about something, or wanting somebody. You kept calling out 'Hello, Sanna,' or something like that, as though you . . ."

Jon had been digesting that, but now its

true import struck him all at once. His excitement raised both his body and his voice.

"Say that again, Mammy!" he shouted, eyes agleam with the beginning of understanding and remembrance. "Say what you just now said I said!"

"Why, Honey, I just said you kept calling for somebody by the name of Sanna; you kept yelling 'Hello, Sanna,' like you wanted 'em to come and help you."

"Of course," he said, mostly to himself, striking his forehead with the heel of his hand. "How stupid of me to forget. No wonder She didn't come when I called." He turned to them. "It wasn't 'Hello, Sanna' I was saying, Mammy. It was *'Aillau, Sa'antha,'* and that's what I was trying so hard to remember. Those are the words my Beautiful Lady taught me, by which to call her."

Ignoring their questions about this, he slowly raised himself to a full sitting position, then slid his feet out from under the covers and into his slippers, lying on the floor beside his bed. Slowly he rose and stood holding the bedpost for a moment while his head cleared. Then he reached for his robe.

"What you think you're doing, Honey?" Mammy asked, and Uncle Girard came forward as though to stop him.

He ignored them, however. When they would have restrained him, he first motioned them away, and then pushed angrily against them with unexpected strength. And was gone from the room.

Down the broad stairs he went, his purpose seeming to give him new vigor with each foot of progress made. Through the door and into the yard, shivering a bit, noting the sky was thickly overcast now, that there was the feel of rain in the air. He headed for the shed-garage, got into his car, backed it out, and headed it down the lane. He heard Uncle Girard call, saw him running forward, but neither answered nor waited.

TOO impatient to spend the time and energy opening it, he crashed through the gate leading into the alfalfa field, leaving splintered wreckage behind him. Out across the rough, uneven field he thundered, bumping and rocking so he could hardly control the weaving of the big car. At the edge of the Big Wood he climbed out of the car without waiting to turn off the ignition.

The rain was coming down hard now, and thunder and lightning were adding to the din. But Maryth did not heed them. He trotted as fast as his trembling legs would bear him, towards the little clearing and the spring, calling out constantly as he ran, *"Aillau! Aillau, Sa'antha!* It is young Jon coming back to you! *Aillau Sa'antha!"*

He was nearly at the spring now, stumbling in his weakness, yet his anxiety and purpose compelling him on. His eyes searched eagerly ahead in every direction, though his voice seemed hardly audible above the fury of the storm.

He fell face downward on the path, and when his tired and worn muscles proved unequal to the task of raising his body upright once more, crawled forward, painfully, on hands and knees, still calling into the night and storm, *"Aillau! Aillau, Sa'antha!"*

Suddenly he saw Her, saw his Sa'antha step out of—not from behind, but actually *out of*—the big oak under which they had sat so often.

He called again, and She came close to him, looking down. She gazed puzzledly a moment, then an awareness grew that this strange young man was in reality the same human boy she had known and loved years ago . . . for whom she still grieved. Sa'antha uttered a cry of joy, then had her arms about him, lifting him, supporting him, leading him under the shelter of the great oak where, miraculously it seemed to him, no rain was falling now. Gently she eased his tired, aching body onto the soft mossy bank, his head softly cradled against her.

"Sa'antha, my lovely, Beautiful Lady. It's been so long . . . and I've been so lonely."

She murmured soft words, alien words, but comforting to his heart, and bringing peace and contentment once more. More quietly, then, he told her how he had been taken by his parents to live in that distant city, without even the chance of coming to bid Her farewell and explain.

"I cried, too, when you suddenly stopped coming," Sa'antha said gently. "My poor old oak has nearly died, I've neglected it so, grieving for you."

He told her of his illness, his continual grieving for her. Brokenly he related the death of his parents, and of his resolve immediately afterwards to come seeking her. Of his day-dreams of remembrance of her, of his search, and how he had forgotten *the words of call,* of his illness when he could not find her and how his subconscious had remembered during his delirium.

"Can we not always be together now?" he begged. "It is only with you that I'll ever know true happiness and life. We can be, can't we?"

"I'd like that as much as you," she responded, and was silent, thoughtful for a long moment, while the storm raged about them. Then she nodded as though in decision and, rising to her feet, moved out into the storm-swept clearing.

Jon could hear her praying to the wind and the rain and the earth and the sky, asking that they two might be always together, that they need never part.

The young man staggered to his feet and moved out beside her. He joined his prayers to hers, with all his faith, with all his desire and need.

And then it happened. His sight gradually blurred, he could no longer see distinctly. There was a curious stiffening feeling about his body. He glanced downward and saw a tender sprig of green bud starting from one of his fingers, then another and another. The bud swelled and burst, showing fine, young leaves of green.

The rain was falling harder now, and as it fell he could feel it washing away his clothing, washing away his mortality.

Dimly, he heard a shout from the distance, and he raised his fast-dimming eyes to see a figure he guessed must be Uncle Girard, running toward the spring. The old man had followed in spite of the storm. Jon felt a moment of sorrowful compunction for the grief his passing would bring, but knew that this was best.

Sa'antha was still praying, her voice no longer audible in his ears . . . yet he heard it still inside his mind, with his rapidly changing senses—heard and now understood her words. Maryth could perceive that the earth, the rain, the wind and the sky were listening, were sympathetic, were assisting.

The earth piled about his feet, and he could feel rootlets groping from his trembling flesh into the cool sweetness of the friendly soil.

His arms were now upraised, bark-covered, budding branches, his height increasing rapidly, his human senses subtly dissolving into newer, more ethereal forms.

The wind blew about them. The two oaks touched in the raining wind. The last vestige of Jon Maryth's mortality dissolved and rained in droplets to the warm earth, even as Uncle Girard, running still, slipped and started to fall, but caught himself against the new young tree.

The oak seemed to writhe. Girard stared at him, at the tree, then looked away, crying to the raining wilderness, "Mister Jon!"

Running again, he vanished away, while the rain fell steadily upon the trees and their leaves rustled quietly, one against the other, as Sa'antha entered her new home.

The housekeeper was grim; was the other creature in the black triangle really a dog?

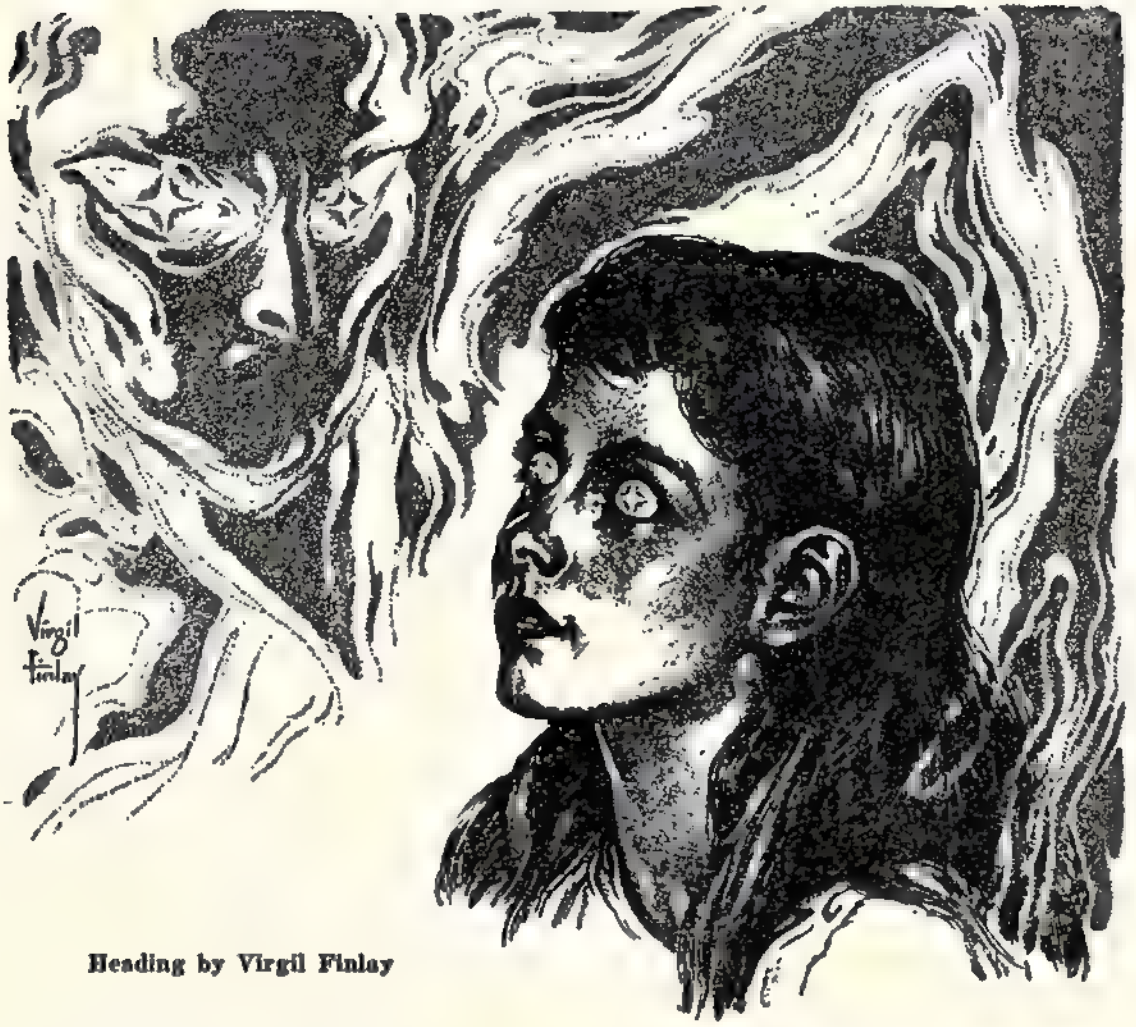
BLACK AS THE NIGHT

By Alice Farnham

in the next WEIRD TALES

The Lost Path

BY AUGUST DERLETH



Heading by Virgil Finlay

BENDING to the papers on the side table, Mrs. Canfield spoke over her shoulders to the agent on the settee behind her. "There has evidently been some confusion, Mr. Kaufmann, for Mrs. Fellows seems upset about a provision she appears to have made regarding this house. —Ah, here we are."

She turned, a tall, imposing woman, still young—under thirty—and came away from the table holding a yellow paper in her hand.

Kaufmann, an elderly, professional gentleman, looked apprehensively at the cablegram, and took it somewhat gingerly from Mrs. Canfield's hand.

"It came this afternoon," she went on. "When I first called you, you were out. So I called again."

Kaufmann nodded, adjusted his pince-

The little boy had a playmate—a shining one, he said.

nez, and read the cablegram which his tenant had received from Vienna a few hours before.

My agent informs you have taken my summer home in Badger Prairie Stop Am distressed Know you have little boy Had forbidden Kaufmann to let house to anyone with small children Stop Please feel free to break lease should anything displease you Stop I sail for America within week Will be in Badger end month Shall be glad then to explain position to you

Georgiana Fellows

The agent looked up to face Mrs. Canfield's challenging eyes.

"Is it true she forbade you to let the house to anyone with small children?" she asked.

Kaufmann nodded. "Yes, that's true enough. But that provision has kept the place empty for years, and I don't think she's justified in allowing it to go to seed."

"Doesn't she like children?"

The agent smiled wryly. "I understood her to say that only her love for children caused her to make the provision."

Mrs. Canfield made an abrupt gesture with her outspread hands. "But this is a paradise for children!"

Shaking her head, she added decisively. "I think I'll wait for Mrs. Fellows to explain when she comes."

Kaufmann seemed relieved. "Then you don't intend to break the lease, Mrs. Canfield? Nothing has displeased you?"

Mrs. Canfield smiled. "You forget, I've been away from the house for over a month. This is in reality my first week of occupation."

Kaufmann nodded and rose to go. At the door he reminded her, "Well, if anything should happen, just call on me. Mrs. Fellows may be delayed, and perhaps there *is* something sincere in her strange provision."

He *is* nervous, Mrs. Canfield thought, watching him bustle away down the street. She glanced once more at the cablegram, a puzzled frown growing on her forehead. Then she closed the door and walked slowly back into the drawing-room.

The governess spoke of Donald Canfield that night at supper, but not until his mother had asked, as usual, "And how was my boy today, Elena?"

"Very restless, Mrs. Canfield, and, I'm sorry to say, quite unusually mischievous." She hesitated fleetingly and then added, "It's the house, I think."

"The house?" A stab of apprehension touched her. But how absurd!

"Yes—the change of scene: new house and surroundings. He ran away three times, and each time I found him in those lilac bushes at the foot of the garden. He seems very fond of flowers."

"He is."

Her apprehension diminished but did not entirely vanish. The curious cablegram from Mrs. Fellows, Kaufmann's own reluctance, the coincidence of the moment lent a tenuous substance to the little stab of fear she had felt.

"You like the house, Elena?"

"Oh, very much. It has such an air of freedom—surely it's just right for a boy!"

The house stood on the western edge of the village, facing toward houses. Behind it stood a row of lilac bushes, like a border to separate it from the prairie with its groves of oak and cedar and, beyond, the hills rising bluely into the sky. The sense of freedom was manifest; perhaps it was because of the location of the house, for the prairie invited one to enjoy the sun and the wind, and at night, the stars.

But the sense of freedom was not the only thing which was conveyed to Mrs. Canfield.

"Do you know," said Elena thoughtfully a few days later, "I can hardly abide those lilacs. I suppose it's because Donald insists on running through among them, and I have a difficult time getting him back from the other side. But I have the oddest feeling of prejudice, like—I don't know just what."

"Like an enemy," said Mrs. Canfield later in the day. "I know; I was there myself. Whatever could it be?"

"But *he* doesn't feel it," said the governess. "Why?"

"Perhaps because we're two silly women."

The governess laughed. "He's six now. This fall he can go to school."

She spoke with such patent relief that Mrs. Canfield could not help noticing. "Are you so anxious for him to go, Elena? Is he too much trouble?"

"Oh, no," the governess hastened to assure her. "It's only that he'll have his mind on something else but the lilac bushes and those fancies of his."

Mrs. Canfield widened her eyes a little. "What fancies?"

"Hasn't he spoken to you about them?"

"No."

"Well!" The governess moved swiftly to the door and called to the boy, who was at play in the enclosed yard.

He came, a slender, blue-eyed, tow-headed boy, with some freckles bridging his nose.

Mrs. Canfield was direct and blunt. "Donald, what is this about the lilac bushes that you like?"

He flashed a reproachful glance at the governess. "It's the path," he said.

"But there isn't a path, is there?" Mrs. Canfield looked to the governess to answer. Elena shook her head.

"There is so," he said stubbornly.

"And what else?" asked Elena gently.

"The one I play with. The one who shines."

"A boy?" asked Mrs. Canfield.

"No." He was less reluctant to talk now, seeing that the opposition he had feared had not materialized. "No, it's a man—or something like a man. Not altogether." He went on to describe an impossible being.

"You see, Elena," said Mrs. Canfield confidently, after he had been allowed to resume his play, "it's perfectly natural for a solitary child to imagine a playmate for himself. I'm not sure it isn't a good thing; the psychiatrists seem to be divided on that subject. Of course, he *does* have an unusually vivid imagination. Where do you suppose he got that creature?"

"Out of a movie or a book—or the radio," ventured the governess.

"I'd have a hard time myself conjuring up something like that," laughed Mrs. Canfield.

HOWEVER reassured she was, Mrs. Canfield saw no harm in making a few discreet enquiries in Badger Prairie. She could nowhere unearth anything at all against the house. Mrs. Fellows was in a different category. Those who were not reluctant to talk told her a good deal about both Mrs. Fellows and her late husband, as well as the little girl they had had. Queer people, beyond a doubt. He had been some kind of scientist, an astronomer or something of that sort. He had had a little laboratory or observatory out in back of the house. She had been jealous of his work, and they had not got along very well. Finally he had gone off and left her, taking the little girl along, God knew where? Had she raised a hue and cry? Oh, no—she had just torn down his laboratory, re-landscaped the place, and gone to Europe, where she had remained ever since.

"Evidently an extraordinary woman," said Mrs. Canfield to the governess, on her return. She told her what she had learned. "Of course, I discount much of such gossip in small towns; people have so little to do that gossiping is a kind of outlet for them. Even so, there must be something to what they say. And when you consider that extraordinary attitude of hers about the house, you begin to feel that she is not like the average woman. At least, it relieves my mind somewhat; I had begun to wonder."

"I too. I wish Donald had someone to play with. I've been thinking—wouldn't it be a good idea to have a little party some day and invite a few of the village children?"

"Go right ahead, Elena."

THE party took place in three days. Donald was not enchanted. He was polite but a little distant, and soon it was apparent that he was bored. In the middle of the party he disappeared, and it became necessary for the harried governess to summon Mrs. Canfield to help look for him.

"The lilacs," murmured Mrs. Canfield at once. "He's slipped through them out on to the prairie. Where else could he be?"

She walked around the row of lilacs, sending the governess back to be among the children, who had hardly missed their host. On the other side of the flourishing bushes, the prairie stretched away, given an illusory breadth it did not really have by the shimmering sunlight and the waves of heat that were stratified above the hot grass. On her left rose a grove of oak trees fringed with cedar; she decided, after due consideration of the landscape, that Donald must be there.

She called. Her voice rolled out over the prairie to the distant hills and came faintly, spectrally back.

There was no answer.

Strange where he could have gone, she thought. She called again and again. In all this expanse, she thought, there's no place to hide unless the groves were closer. She was just turning away in some bewilderment when he appeared suddenly in the waving grass before her.

"Where in the world have you been?" she demanded.

"Here," he replied.

How could she have missed seeing him? she wondered.

"Right here on the path," he went on. "With him."

She said nothing in answer; she would not be tricked by his fancies. The shimmering of heat waves above the hot prairie might very readily have concealed him.

"Get back to your party, Donald. You must never forget your duty to your guests."

He flashed her an enigmatic glance that was almost ironic, but in a moment it passed; he acquiesced and walked beside her until they came to the lilacs. There he darted forward and wriggled through among the bushes, while she walked around. It occurred to her that he had made himself a course among the bushes, for he seemed to know just the way to go. When she came to the other side, she saw him in the midst of his guests, but curiously aloof and alone, with the children standing all around him, but not close to him at all, keeping off a respectful, almost servile, distance.

In only a little while, the children came to make their good-byes, evasive, diffident. Could he have said something to them? None of them made any complaint, however. They were polite, the little girls gracious, but undeniably anxious to get away, which was far different from the days of her own childhood, when it was necessary for harried parents or governesses to call before a children's party came to an end.

Donald gave no sign of having behaved in any untoward manner when at last he came in. He was self-assured and pleased that the party had ended.

Nevertheless, the party was a turning point of a sort. Previous to it, Donald had been rather passive; after the party he seemed to grow steadily more aggressive, as if exposure to the children had lent him a self-sufficience he did not previously possess. In a sense, this was gratifying; he was never offensively aggressive, but he was possessed of an insatiable curiosity about everything. He kept not only his mother and his governess busy answering interminable questions, but he began to read voraciously, by no means confining himself to the somewhat advanced books in his own library. It could therefore not be gainsaid that the party had been a good thing. Yet, curiously, neither of the women was moved to repeat it, half out of fear that the children, for some obscure reasons of their own, would refuse to come, half out of uncertainty about what Donald might do.

A week later, Mrs. Canfield discovered a few crushed papers, little more than scraps, far back in the drawer of the bureau in her room. She had already thrown them away when she was moved to look at them, and saw that they were apparently pages from a pocket-size daybook or record of some kind. The entries were under three dates, one on each page.

Curious, she read them in sequence.

"5/7—Saw him (it?) again today. Unable to determine *raison d'etre*. Point of contact? or of entry? Which? The creature would seem definitely to be male. And yet—?

"5/11—The other side. Reverse of the field—the same grass, the same trees, the same sky, but all illusion which conceals the real nature of the landscape. Georgiana would never believe. The question to be answered—is it conterminous or another planet contingent on our own?

"5/21—Lili attracts as a focus and is attracted through the contact I have managed to make. Strange, and somewhat alarming. She seems to be drawn here more and more. Perhaps she ought to be sent away. Control is too chancey a thing; it may weaken or fail . . ."

She could make nothing out of them save that they were obviously lost pages from a journal. They had probably been torn out of the book, thrust into the drawer and, later, escaped being gathered up when

the drawer was cleaned out before her own occupation of the house. That they belonged to the late Mr. Fellows was perfectly clear; his reference to "Georgiana" must be to the woman who had signed the warning cablegram she had received, and "Lili" was surely their daughter.

But whatever meaning they had was lost on her. It was like reading a little out of the heart of a book and trying to determine beginning and end therefrom; it could not be done successfully.

She intended to show the scraps to Elena, but the governess brought back from the village a disquieting rumor which had been gossiped around. It had taken root after the party; it was absurd, but the children were adamant in maintaining it. There were "two" boys living at Mrs. Canfield's.

"But how ridiculous!" cried Mrs. Canfield. "Wherever can they have got hold of such a story?"

"It's queer, Mrs. Canfield, but they insist that one of the boys was at the party with them and went away; then another one came."

Light broke upon her perplexity. "Of course," laughed Mrs. Canfield, "that was when Donald got out into the prairie and I sent him back."

"Dressed just the same," the governess went on. "Only different. One of them was fun to be with; the other one scared them."

"So that's what he did!" murmured Mrs. Canfield. "Perhaps it was a good thing we didn't plan any more parties."

Elena agreed. She wanted to say more, but thought better of it. The children's absurd story was disturbing, and some intuition troubled her, but, since it did not trouble Mrs. Canfield also, she could not herself put it into coherent words. Doubtless Mrs. Canfield would think her equally absurd. And yet . . .

Her employer was looking at her with narrowed eyes. "Was there something else, Elena?"

"I wanted to say—but it's my own imagination. It's this house that does it."

"Does what?"

"Well, I could understand how the children felt. You see, I felt something like that, too. He's been so different; something seems to have changed him."

"He's growing, Elena!"

"I mean, in a different way," she strove futilely to explain.

Mrs. Canfield smiled tolerantly.

IN another week, the governess brought back even more upsetting rumors. This time they were of an entirely different nature and almost equally incredible, testifying to the imaginative resources of a populace far removed from ordinary avenues of entertainment. Someone had broken into the village library during the night and made off with a quartet of books—all references, one on general science, one on astronomy, one on biology, and one on interplanetary flight. It was an absurd theft, since anyone might have borrowed the books from the library, and none was in any way valuable or irreplaceable.

The disquieting factor was that someone supposed to have been the thief had been seen and the description of the alleged thief, however scanty, had been identified by village children as "that other boy at Mrs. Canfield's."

"Oh, but this is monstrous!" cried Mrs. Canfield. "Surely that's carrying malice too far!"

The governess said nothing. Her eyes betrayed uncertainty and bewilderment, doubt and harassment.

"Elena! You don't think—surely, not for one moment . . ."

"There was one night he wasn't in his bed, Mrs. Canfield," the governess said apologetically. "I didn't want to trouble you. I got up and looked around. I thought he had gone out to the prairie again, but he wasn't there."

"Hadn't you noticed that since the day I brought him back to his party he hasn't spent any more time out there?"

"Yes, I had. But I thought . . ."

"Never mind. Go on."

"When I got back into the house, he was in bed again. I don't know where he was."

"I think you're letting your imagination run away with you, Elena. Next thing you'll actually be hunting for those books."

"No, Mrs. Canfield. If he had them, he'd know how to hide them good."

Mrs. Canfield smiled tolerantly. "What

on earth would he want with books like those!"

"Oh, he's been obsessed with wanting to learn things," cried Elena. "You know he has. He reads everything, he pores over pictures. He asks questions from morning to dark."

"His father was an intellectual man. Send Donald to me, please."

The governess left the room. She found Donald absorbed in a book, sitting in a shady nook in the garden. He came willingly in response to her call, overflowing with questions.

"Why is it, Elena, if you are built in one way you can't do things you could if you were built in another?" he asked.

"You are subject to the limitations of your form," responded Elena promptly. "It's like this—if you have an arm three feet long, you can't expect to reach four feet. See?"

He was still pondering this when he found himself facing his mother.

"Where were you the other night when Elena found your bed empty?" she demanded without preamble.

"Outside. The moon was shining; I woke up and went out. It was nice outside." He intercepted a glance between the two women and added, "I saw Elena looking for me and I hid till I could get back into the house without being caught. I was in bed again when she looked."

Mrs. Canfield softened. "All right, Donald. But don't do such a thing again, please."

"Is that all?"

"Yes, go back to your book."

The governess made a futile gesture.

"You see, Elena—all your dark suspicions! And wouldn't it be virtually impossible for a child so young to break into a building like the library? The whole thing is simply fantastic."

"They say he's been seen other places in town late at night, too, when everybody else is sleeping."

"And if everybody else is sleeping," retorted Mrs. Canfield with acerbity, "who in the village is left to see him?" She shook her head.

"I'm afraid our little party has really served no good end; it has set children to fancying things and their elders to embroidering them."

NEXT day Kaufmann was on the telephone.

"Mrs. Canfield, Mrs. Fellows will be here this afternoon. She telephoned from Chicago, and seemed surprised to learn that you weren't out of the house." He chuckled. "I assured her everything was all right." There was a moment of apprehensive hesitation. "It is, isn't it?"

"Of course, Mr. Kaufmann."

"Very well. She will want to come over at once when she arrives. I expect her between three and four. Will you see us then?"

"Certainly."

Georgiana Fellows came, accompanied by an uncomfortable-looking Kaufmann who, it was plain, had been berated for not adhering to the terms of Mrs. Fellows' directions. She was a slender woman, not yet old, dressed in gray and blue, as if still in casual mourning for the unhappy events of her existence. Her eyes were gray and warm, her mouth almost forbidding in its thinness. Her appearance at once aroused Mrs. Canfield's curiosity and enlisted her sympathy; she decided, intuitively, that village gossip did Mrs. Fellows injury and injustice.

"I thought surely you had left the house, Mrs. Canfield," she said at once. "I could hardly have made myself plainer to Mr. Kaufmann, and I thought that certainly, by this time . . ."

"It is so pleasant here," said Mrs. Canfield.

"Nothing has gone wrong?"

"Nothing at all."

"Thank heaven!" Her relief was unmistakably genuine.

She sat down now at Mrs. Canfield's invitation. Patently, she had been under too great a tension even to relax until she had been met by Mrs. Canfield's reassurance that all was well. What could she have expected? Mrs. Canfield wondered. The sunny afternoon, the coziness of the house, the fragrant air, the atmosphere of repose all combined to soothe and comfort.

"I have taken Mr. Kaufmann to task for his failure to make clear to you the urgence of my stipulation," Mrs. Fellows went on. "I know I owe you an explanation, and I

intend to make it. But I warn you, you will find it extremely strange, almost outré—you may think perhaps I am out of my mind. But I owe it to you, and you shall have it."

"Mr. Kaufmann did his best," Mrs. Canfield put in. "Short of ordering me from the property. I preferred to wait until you came."

The agent nodded unhappily.

Mrs. Fellows disregarded him. "I should explain that my husband was an amateur scientist, with a marked interest in astronomy and speculation about existence beyond earth. I am sorry to admit that I had no interest whatsoever to share with him in scientific matters, though I encouraged him in every way, of course. He put up a little combination laboratory and observatory out on the prairie, just west of the house . . . "

"That would be beyond the row of lilacs?" hazarded Mrs. Canfield.

"Yes." For a moment she looked speculatively at her tenant. "But, of course, you found out from people in Badger Prairie." Satisfied, she went on. "He had some curious theories about life on other planets and on the stars, and he believed that there were other worlds invisible to us existing not very far away—not worlds like ours, you understand, but worlds composed of other elements. It was all very difficult, I need hardly tell you, and I made little attempt to follow him, since I have always known so little of scientific matters.

"We lived on an independent income my husband had inherited, and we got along very nicely. He did his experiments and wrote little papers for scientific journals and that is the way we would very probably still be living if it were not for what happened. One day he came in excitedly and said that he had made a 'contact' with someone or something from 'the other side'—the outside. My first thought was that he had made some absurd mistake, or that he was suffering from an hallucination of some kind; after all, hallucinations are an occupational disease for people who study a great deal. I tried to prevail on him to take a holiday, but he wouldn't hear of it. Thereafter, he spent almost all his time at his observatory; he kept notes on his 'visitor', and he tried to explain something about him to me—but I am afraid most of it was beyond me; it is not very convincing to hear about something you can neither see nor feel.

"The 'visitor' was evidently not something of flesh and blood, but kind of gaseous or vaporous being which had a constantly changing form. It is perfectly evident how incredible my husband's 'visitor' was, and it is surely understandable that I should be extremely dubious about it. I was. I thought my poor husband was out of his head. The creature, whatever it was, seemed to be insatiably curious about the way in which human beings lived, my husband reported, and he was constantly the object of a great many questions it managed to convey to him, by what means, I know not, for though it appeared to be an intelligent being, I had not heard my husband speak of its talking."

She paused. She had an apologetic air, almost as if at this late date, she were expiating her doubt of her husband.

"Do go on, Mrs. Fellows," urged Mrs. Canfield.

"Well, it's so difficult to talk about it, even now, because it's so far out of the realm of everyday experience. I should sum it up, I suppose, by saying that my husband began to have some doubts about the creature's purpose, finally, but by that time he had discovered that our little girl, Lili, was drawn to the laboratory by some intuitive process which neither of us could fathom. Perhaps the child mind was more susceptible to such an influence as the creature possessed; it is prepared to accept everything without question, and has none of the adult's ability to select. Before either of us could come to any full understanding that there was danger to Lili in this, it was too late.

"Lili had gone to the laboratory alone and had encountered the creature; it simply entered into her. My husband noticed it at once; I failed. It was apparently motivated by its desire to learn more about human beings and how they lived; it utilized the contact provided by Mr. Fellows, and the opening afforded by our poor Lili to come into an existence in our world. Evidently it had a certain elasticity of form which we human beings do not have; it was prepared to sacrifice that for the limitations of the human form, knowing it could return to its own home whenever it wished through the

contact provided. It occupied Lili. It is as simple and as unbelievable as that.

"When we discovered it—or rather, when my husband succeeded in convincing me of what had happened—Lili, or what was occupying Lili, knew. It returned to the laboratory and vanished, taking Lili along. Unfortunately, my husband, perhaps because he lost his innate caution, vanished, too. I never understood how it had happened; I knew only that it had. I never knew what had become of them; I never saw either of them again.

"I razed the building my husband had used, and I destroyed the path to it by planting a row of lilacs across it. But the site remained a focus for children, as I discovered when my nephew visited me here, and I found him one day intuitively making his way along the path to the laboratory, among the lilacs, though I had obliterated it . . . Why, Mrs. Canfield, what is it? What's the matter?"

Mrs. Canfield, who felt her self-assurance washing from her like water, strove to control herself in the face of the chill horror mushrooming up inside her. "How did your husband describe it? You said a gaseous thing?"

"He used to compare it to the kind of shimmering you see on hot days—heat waves, he said."

Elena sprang up with a cry. "The one who shines!"

Mrs. Canfield said grimly, "Call Don, please."

The instant the boy walked into the room, Mrs. Canfield saw what she had been too wilfully blind to see before. She saw it even before Mrs. Fellows came shakily to her feet, crying, "Oh, the eyes! That isn't your son, Mrs. Canfield!"

The boy no longer masked his eyes; what burned there was not blue, but something lambent, like fire, lambent and glowing. He turned, darted out of the house, and ran across the garden.

There was a graven moment of stunned hesitation before the agent, Kaufmann, jumped up and ran after him. The three women followed, spreading to go around the row of lilacs.

But the boy was faster. He darted among the lilacs and passed through, following the lost path he had known intuitively was there. He ran out upon the prairie, not far, to the site of the laboratory, the contact, and there, before their eyes, he faded and dissolved into nothingness.

For an instant there was a shimmering of light, a spreading of heat waves over the prairie grass. When they reached the spot, nothing remained save a powdering of fine dust.

The Singing Shadow

By YETZA GILLESPIE

NOBODY came through the moonlight,
Nobody knocked on the door,
Singing, by way of a greeting,
An old light-hearted score;

But a shadow crossed the moonpath
And leaned against the door,
And something sang from the darkness,
That elsewhere sings no more.

"I have come . . . from Hell . . . to you. Hold me! Save me!"

The Sin Eater

BY G. G. PENDARVES

LOOK about you! What do you think of this land where the dark experiment we shall watch takes place? This ancient haunted land of Cornwall—unfertile, unfriendly, isolated until last century from the world, even from the rest of England. Old gods, old worships, old forgotten races have died hard and lingeringly in this narrow peninsula. Cromlechs, shrines and ruined altars on many lonely hills and desolate moors still remain to remind, to suggest, with dark portents of evil.

Not long ago Black Magic darkened the thoughts and lives of men here, from Land's End to King Arthur's Seat; not long enough to purge the duchy of its evil, not long enough to drive out forces so long dominant.

Apparently—oh, yes—apparently only legends remain: legends useful to amuse summer visitors in company with wishing-wells, smugglers' caves, bathing-beaches, old coastguard paths, Roman forts, ancient tin mines, pilchards and clotted cream. Let it go at that. Legends!

In reality this is the story of a master scientist who dealt with human powers which few of us begin to understand. And it is always comfortable to deny the existence of what we don't understand. We demand of science improvement, discovery, bigger and better toys to play with in order that we can more easily forget the briefness of our stay in the playground itself. The science we support is obvious, spectacular, dealing only with matter, dealing with our bodies very specially that they may be bigger, better bodies so that we may stay longer to play with our toys.

But the mind of man! How convenient to forget the sciences that concern the mind of man! The majority have a touching faith in modern psychology as being a complete map to it. About as comprehensive and true a map as those of the world made in the Twelfth Century!

That's as it may be, but most readers will grant, however, the suitability of our background here in Cornwall for this, for almost any imaginable mystery. Look at the broken, towering, gloomy cliffs. They guard memories of bloodshed, violence and tragedy, of wild gales and greedy seas, of battered ships and drowning men, of wreckers more barbaric than Moorish pirates, of smugglers and press-gangs, of long centuries of struggle between man and his enemy, the sea.

On this wild coast the breaking tides boom one continuous knell—death!

And inland? Do these bare moors, this stern gray granite give you comfort?

Look closer—closer—at this old fishing-port. It is full of narrow cobbled ways, full of dark-skinned, dark-eyed fishermen, their swarming children, their hundreds of cats.

This is the port of Trink. This is where we shall watch a great experiment.

We reach the great iron gates of Lamorna House—follow a shadowed drive between tall firs that moan and whisper the sea's long dirge—death! death! death!

MARK ZENNOR was dying.

He lay in his great carven bed and watched the pair of lovers with hard, merciless eyes. His young wife, Rosaina, and Stephen Lynn, his nephew, secretary and——? What else Stephen was, or would shortly be, was hidden in the dying man's thoughts.

Dying! It seemed impossible to Rosaina. She knew the doctors had given him up, said the patient was hanging on hour by hour by a miracle of will-power. She knew her husband had repeatedly affirmed this. But he seemed to her more awfully alive than ever.

"Death, where is thy sting?
Where grave, thy victory?"

The words flashed across her confused and terrified thoughts. Hysteria threatened. How ironical, those words, in connection with a death-bed like this! She bit her lip, closed her smarting eyes. Mark's voice stabbed her to control again. Her eyes opened to meet his sharp, cruel stare.

"Permit me to offer my sympathy. This is a most difficult role for you, my dear. Unpardonable of me to subject you to such embarrassment. It should have been so simple, so congenial a task to speed a parting guest. And an inconvenient husband at that! But *my* exit from this world? You feel something is lacking, eh? Now why?—why, Rosaina?"

Why indeed? For the life of her she couldn't formulate her deep uneasiness. Mark really was dying, there could be no question of it; all the doctors and specialists had agreed on that. A great many doctors had come and gone during the week of Mark's illness.

"It's only fair to you and Stephen that I take my departure with a good deal of publicity," he had explained. "My illness is so sudden and so unexpected that rumors might arise as to whether you two had connived at it. With all the drugs I use in my body a post-mortem would be very unconvincing."

It was remarks like this that stuck in Rosaina's mind. And the flicker of laughter in his eyes as he'd said them. At this very moment he—

"You're a fool, Rosaina, but not quite such a fool as Stephen. You at least realize how little you understand my work—my art. And you are afraid. Most wise. My nephew, on the other hand—"

He turned his great head, massive and bold in outline as the carved figurehead of a ship. His dark-red hair, tonsured like a monk's, was untouched by gray in spite of his eighty years. Under a tremendous brow, his eyes glittered like quartz in strong sunlight. His nose was long, finely cut, extremely sensitive, and, in conjunction with deeply-sunken cheeks and the fine brow, would have stamped him as an intellectual and ascetic had it not been for the mouth. That was a horror, a great bar of ugly crimson across the colorless face.

Stephen Lynn did not meet his uncle's keen, stabbing glance. He sat in the glow of a cavernous red fire across the room, and though ill at ease and resentful of his uncle's characteristically unpleasant way of conducting his death-bed scene Stephen's clever, mobile face showed neither fear nor doubt.

"My nephew," pursued Mark, "is too much a man of the world, of *this* world, to share your misgivings as to the future, Rosaina.

"Imperial Caesar, dead and turned to clay,
Might stop a hole to keep the wind away.

"My widow and her wealth would stop a good-sized hole. Exactly!"

A stain of color showed in the young man's face, too pale and sharply drawn for his age and build. But Stephen was a young man of character and ambition. His uncle paid him handsomely. He'd found the resources of Lamorna library invaluable for his own private researches. And there was always Rosaina. The fact of her near and dear presence had made his difficult, often revolting work possible.

He made no reply in speech, but Mark Zennor saw the red blood in his cheeks and sniggered.

"Don't trouble to conceal your face, my boy. And your thoughts are perfectly correct, too. I *am* almost finished, so it's hardly worth while your taking me seriously now. I shall die before midnight."

STEPHEN frowned at the floor between his knees. He'd never got accustomed to his uncle's hateful trick of snatching the thoughts from his brain and putting them into words. He glanced across at Rosaina sitting on the far side of the great curtained bed. How nervous and strained she looked! He'd be thankful when the end came and he could take her away.

"After all, Stephen," the voice from the bed proceeded, "you owe me a good deal. You've done better for yourself here than would have been possible elsewhere. The laboratory I fitted up for your exclusive use. The lines of research I indicated. Your salary. And the beautiful widow I am so obligingly going to leave for you. All these things must be balanced against less congenial aspects of your work under my roof. In fact, I'm hoping you will not grudge a last small service—a mere trifle, I assure you."

Rosaina turned her head sharply. She recognized the note in Mark's voice with a pang of fear. He was going to ask Stephen something important—something of such importance that he thought it worth while to subdue possible opposition with a weapon that never failed him. Her own heart leaped, her pulses thrilled in response to it. Mark's voice! Against all instinct and reason, those who heard *that* note in Mark's voice had no choice but to obey.

"Don't be anxious, my beautiful Rosaina. Indeed, my child, you must not be too sad, too tragic. I assure you there is hope, there is indeed hope!"

She shivered. Hope! What did he mean by that taunt? He knew his death was the one hope she had. He knew how she loathed and feared him, how she had tried to escape. But he would not let her go. And what Mark Zennor wanted he accomplished by methods peculiar to himself. She shivered again at memory of how, in the early days of her marriage, she had tried to run away. Mark had got her back in three days by means of a dream which haunted her during her absence. A very vile little dream, if indeed that whispering obscenity which never left her day or night could be called a dream. Possibly Mark might have used a more accurate term in describing the messenger he'd sent to bring back the runaway.

"Yes, hope! You were thinking on the right lines just now, my Rosaina, when your mind ran on death. I do indeed propose to rob it of its sting. And Stephen shall help me. I leave nothing to chance, to faith. I don't live by faith—that last resort of the inferior mind. I prove everything. I *have* proved everything—everything in this extremely elementary world of ours."

"Proved everything!"

Stephen echoed the words. For a moment he actually believed the monstrous assertion. His own mind seemed to shrink and shrivel, confronted by a knowledge and intelligence brilliant as the noontide sun.

Then he was himself again, but shaken, a trifle fallen in his own esteem until he remembered a reason for his peculiar and absurd emotion. Watching by a dying man was not conducive to perfect functioning of the nerves, more especially when the dying man was his Uncle Mark. He rallied himself and smiled at Rosaina. She mustn't guess how close he'd been to sharing her own superstitious fear of this megalomaniac.

"It reassures me, Stephen, to see you smile."

Rosaina shuddered at the mad laughter in her husband's eyes.

"You appreciate this death-bed business for what it's worth, a convincing bluff for the ignorant. Objective facts of the most elementary kind are all this so-called scientific age understands. The real experiments are concerned with the spirit—with the *will.*"

Will! At that ominous word Rosaina felt her blood run cold under the costly gold brocade of her gown. Mark insisted always on golden rich materials to set off her honey-gold hair and the matt pallor of her skin. The great emerald, emblem of their marriage, flashed wickedly with each nervous contraction of her hands.

"I am the only man in Europe who needs no faith. I have knowledge. I have mastered the secrets of existence."

Stephen felt completely himself now. Had it not been for Rosaina's obvious apprehensions he'd have started an argument.

"I must say I envy you," he replied. "It must be a wonderful sensation for you!"

"Sensation!"

Zennor's resonant voice gave the word an extraordinary inflection. It expressed all the mad unfathomable derision that danced in the speaker's eyes. He opened a small platinum box, took out a pellet and swallowed it.

"A drug to give that keen edge to my intellect which I find necessary in dealing with you, nephew. I am too much diverted. And I have not much longer now. My—arrangements need scrupulously exact timing. The forces I control are as implacable as they are powerful."

The younger man frowned. He'd not realized quite how mad Rosaina's husband was. He looked at her again with startled apprehension. Good heavens! Was this the sort of thing she'd had to endure? No wonder she'd talked to him so wildly. There really was something in the old devil's voice—in his eyes—something inimical he'd never felt before. What a strong horrible face his uncle had! Curious this was the first time it had seemed malevolent and spiteful. In dying, though, no doubt the face-muscles contracted. Or perhaps the shadow that lay across the bed—

He got up in some haste, stirred the fire to a blaze, threw on a log, turned up a lamp. The shadow over the bed inexplicably remained.

"It's the shadow of death, my boy! Must do the thing properly." Zennor's eyes shone incandescent as a cat's as the fire roared up the chimney. "I promised both of you I'd die within the hour, and I'll keep my word. Death. Funeral. Burial. My mortal body committed to the earth. You two can carry out the whole heathenish sequence in most irreproachable style."

ROSAINA sprang to her feet. Her panic found speech.

"Tell us, tell us quickly what you mean? What is this new trick?—this game you're playing with us?"

Zennor regarded her convulsed features with deep interest.

"You ought to have gone on the stage. Absolutely born for tragic roles! That was perfect! Perfect! I'm grateful for a moment of pure pleasure, Rosaina. It hadn't occurred to me you'd ever give me one again. I never saw you so thrillingly, vitally alive.

Beauty! Passion! Exaltation! If a woman hasn't these she's a poor drab nuisance in the world."

Her tortured eyes looked across the bed to Stephen. He was standing by the fireplace. Irritation and some bewilderment showed on his thin tired face now. He didn't understand the awful fear that made Rosaina's face a Greek mask of horror. He didn't understand the crepitation of his own nerves. He didn't understand why his uncle, whom he'd always regarded as a man of brilliant intellect most grossly misapplied and therefore faintly contemptible, should now be inexplicably dominating, even portentous.

The vast shadowy room was very still for a spellbound minute. Huge black candles burned in wooden standards four feet high and stood in a wide semicircle at the foot of the bed. Their wax gave off a faint scent of ambergris. Three uncurtained windows showed a staring moon and hard bright stars in a sky like polished gleaming steel. Rising wind made the dark firs toss and moan about the house. A dog's long dreary howl rose.

"Stephen!"

Rosaina's voice was like the clash of cymbals.

"Stephen! Take care—ah, take care! There is danger! Mark is not dying—not dying, I tell you! It's a trap for you, my darling. Stephen! *Stephen!*"

Zennor's big smooth supple hands flickered in a movement so swift that Stephen couldn't then, or afterward, recall exactly what he thought he saw, whether from the deepening pall of darkness over the bed a wing fluttered, a claw-like hand leaped forth, or if . . . if it was merely an effect of smoke and flame drawn with sudden swift roar up the great chimney.

Rosaina's hands flew to her throat. She gave a choking cry and fell back in her chair. Zennor's steely gaze turned from her to Stephen.

"Hysteria. I shall be dead in another fifteen minutes in spite of her unwarrantable lack of faith in my promise. You will spare fifteen minutes to hear a dying man's request?"

The cool convincing musical voice checked Stephen. Rosaina was overwrought. She'd had the devil of a time. But now—well, it was only decent to humor his uncle in his last moments.

"If there's anything special, Uncle Mark, anything I can do for you, of course I'll be glad to carry out instructions."

His eyes sought Rosaina. She looked a great deal more like dying than did the man on the bed. Rigid as if bound to her chair, her face, her eyes, her straining throat, every line of her body showed terror bordering on madness.

"She will recover. I shall not."

The words came from the shadow slowly, solemnly. They riveted Stephen's whole attention.

"I am listening, Uncle Mark."

"Then it is soon told. *I wish you to be my sin-eater.*"

The fantastic words meant nothing to the listener. He waited. Mark Zennor's brilliant eyes were turned toward an hourglass set in an alcove near by. Filled with blood-red sand, it was swung between supports formed by two nude figures of transparent amber glass. The thing was of exquisite workmanship wrought by a craftsman whose skill was only equaled by his obscenity.

"The last sands are running out, the last minutes of my life. Soon the glass will turn over. In the moment of its turning I intend to make the change you call death. I have planned this ever since you came here, nephew. It is no question of my eighty years, of failing powers. My brain and body are not affected by time. I learned the small secret of prolonging the life of the body here centuries ago. Oh, it was easy to produce symptoms for the doctors if you're remembering their babble! Sant's the only man who'd have guessed."

His fingers cripsed in angry recollection.

"Sant! The only man who might—"

He glanced again at the hourglass and checked himself.

"I have work that can't be completed on this plane of existence. I am hampered by my body, restricted by its laws. So I shall die."

He caught and held his nephew's eye.

"I ask you only to keep vigil for one hour by my body when I am dead. And then to eat bread, to drink water, and repeat the few words written on this parchment."

He showed a small scroll tied with black tape and sealed. Stephen glanced at the still figure of Rosaina. How ill and queer she looked! It was difficult to think of anything else. His uncle's thick lips twitched in savage amusement.

"She hears and sees you very well. But she is—er—prevented from joining this last intimate talk between us."

"You've—you've hypnotized her!"

Stephen dashed across the room, took the girl's cold stiff hands, called her name. His frantic efforts might as well have been addressed to the chair on which she sat. He swung back to the mocking, mountainous figure on the bed.

"What have you done to her? You old devil! I'll go and call—"

"No!"

Stephen was held in a vise. He could neither speak nor move.

"Unless you swear to obey me, swear to be my sin-eater, Rosaina shall never wake. She shall die in trance as she is now. I can rely on Those who serve me to see to it after I am gone. You can't help her any more than you can help yourself now."

Furiously aware of sudden utter helplessness, Stephen heard Mark Zennor's voice. Its deep organ-note filled the room; its terrible music bound his soul in chains.

"Swear, Stephen Lynn! Come close. Put your hand in mine and swear!"

In spite of fiercest effort, Stephen felt himself obeying the voice, the lambent burning eyes that drew him . . . drew him . . .

He was compelled. His slow, reluctant feet moved forward, he began to cross the width of polished floor between fire and bed. It seemed like some tremendous journey. Cold, deadly conviction of loss and loneliness made those few yards of flooring beneath his feet wider than all the deserts of the world.

Rosaina and his love for her, Rosaina's stricken body close beside him, Rosaina and all their winged and shining future faded in that moment of his strange journey to Mark Zennor's bedside, faded to a small cloudy dream . . . insubstantial . . . drifting . . . drifting out of sight . . . out of mind.

Midnight approached.

The blood-red sands sank low in the hourglass, trickling through a bunch of glass grapes held by an excessively female figure into the opened mouth of an aggressively male one. When the glass swung over, the sands would flow back in a fashion as original as it was unprintable.

Stephen glanced up at the thing and back to the still figure on the bed.

Thank heaven! His hour of vigil was almost over. An hour. It seemed a lifetime since he had pledged himself, left hand in the dying man's cold strong grip, to carry out his uncle's last wish—to be his sin-eater. What a perfectly silly heathenish little ceremonial! And what peculiarly different things brought comfort to the dying! Certainly this last whim of his Uncle Mark's was outstandingly strange.

Little the dead man had ever cared about his sins! A man who refused to recognize any moral code at all, who never applied the words *good* or *evil* to conduct, who lived for experience alone—any—all experience.

His sin-eater! Fantastic notion! When last wishes had been mentioned, Stephen had imagined something far more formidable, something aimed at separating him from Rosaina. But this sin-eating business was merely a gesture—and a pitiful one considering the dead man's extraordinary intellect.

A baffling incalculable character. Sometimes he'd practiced harsh rigid asceticism, reduced his great frame to a skeleton. Sometimes he'd indulged his senses in debaucheries that ought to have killed him—and didn't! He'd used brain and body to their utmost capacity in every conceivable way.

Stephen had known all this before taking on the duties of a secretary two years ago. What he hadn't known, and still didn't believe in, was the reality of the dead man's art. That was his uncle's name for the overruling interest of his violent and checkered life. Stephen was a brilliant young man in his own particular line but he never conceived of anything that came under the heading of occult as being more than the rankest imagination. And imagination, he reasoned, belonged to poets and children in its better manifestations, and to drug-fiends and the morally and mentally deficient in its worse ones.

When a man died, argued Stephen, he utterly ceased to be, save as a memory. Death—death of the body was the end of a man as a separate individual. His work alone survived.

His uncle's work! Stephen reflected on it as represented by the many books that bore Mark Zennor's name. He'd read some of them, a few that were written in English and dealt with scientific subjects. He'd been taken out of his depth and had never tackled the more recondite in German and French. There were books on philosophy in Chinese, Sanskrit, and Hebrew. There were books on music equally beyond his comprehension. He'd tried a volume of poetry once but decided that all the Turkish baths in the world wouldn't make him feel clean after such literary explorations as these.

However, there was one book in the Lamorna library which he had been forced to know from cover to cover. He had made its black linen covers himself and printed every word of the text between them. It was not published, not publishable. It had been his first and most unpleasant task as his uncle's secretary to print this book on the private press that Zennor owned. A short book and a damnable one. The author's references to past vile experiences and experiments, and to others even more monstrous which he intended to carry out, haunted Stephen for months. To his clear young mind such revelations of immense research and familiarity with unspeakable beliefs and practices were lewd expressions of insanity, the excesses of a megalomaniac whose ambitions rivaled Lucifer's.

Finally, however, he grew callous. Profound disbelief enabled him to do his daily work with the detachment of a machine. He ceased even to wonder why his uncle had wasted time and his amazing intellectual powers over such insane and filthy nonsense.

"Yes, filthy nonsense!"

He repeated the words aloud. He was beginning to feel the necessity of reassurance. This vigil was getting on his nerves. Something was wrong with the lamp—it needed refilling, perhaps. His uncle had insisted on lamps and costly special oil for them that made the whole house reek. Tonight the lamp and the fire too—what was wrong?—everything seemed on the jump. Shadows. Beastly what queer imitations of life a shadow could give! Shadows—in that foul little book—they were said to be—

He thrust back persistent words and images, and glanced toward the bed. The old man looked extraordinary. His arms and hands lay naturally by his side, the fingers crisped a little in the characteristic way they had in life. His eyes were open.

"Don't close my eyes, remember, Stephen!" he had commanded. "I want to watch you perform the ceremony."

And, although Stephen would have preferred to close those merciless bright eyes, he had given his word and could not bring himself to break it. He tried however, to be mocking at his obedience, to be watching, waiting . . . waiting . . .

He attempted once more to reason about the thing.

"It's merely reflex action. The old man died believing in all his sticky little devil-worshipping ideas. He died happy in the thought that he was pushing all the results of his highly colored life on to my shoulders and went off believing this sin-eating business would square his accounts. That explains the peculiar expression in his eyes. And that half-smile!"

He frowned, stared.

"It certainly seems more pronounced. Probably it's those drugs he poured into himself to keep going as long as he wanted. When the rigor passes his muscles will relax. Nasty look on a dead face though—very nasty. Still it's perfectly explainable—perfectly!"

He wrenched his gaze from those fixed, sightless eyes. Sightless! It was hard to believe they really were that.

"He knew what he was about when he made me promise not to close them. Damned if the old devil's not at his old games even now he's dead. Trying to hypnotize me."

He moved restlessly, tried to laugh. The face of the dead expressed considerably more amusement than did his own; yet remembrance of this trick of his uncle's brought relief to the watcher. Hypnotism! That was it. That covered everything, especially the strange sensations he'd had just before his Uncle Mark had died. Idiotic to

have laid himself open to it—to have let imagination ride him so completely.

Thanks be! It had passed off almost at once.

Probably Rosaina's collapse had unnerved him, made him susceptible to suggestion. It was the very first time his uncle had ever caught *him* napping. His self-congratulation was unclouded by suspicion of design in this fact.

Rosaina! He looked at her. Still as a statue, white, frozen. Nothing he said or did could wake her.

"When you've fulfilled your promise, Stephen! She won't wake until then," Zennor had repeated. "Not until the hour is up and you've become my sin-eater."

Somehow he felt less concerned about her now—the strained white face, the terror-filled eyes, the slender limbs held as if in bonds! Hypnotized. He felt a faint contempt for the weakness that made her so easy a victim, even a sort of respect for the dominance of a will that could, even after death, exert its influence. Anyhow, if she were in a trance she felt nothing. No use his agonizing over her. Not long now to wait.

A FAINT whirring of machinery drew his glance to the hourglass. Its last grains had run out. Chimes of midnight sounded from some deep-toned village clock. Noiselessly, smoothly, the big hour-glass turned in its half-circle.

He got to his feet, stood beside the dead body. At last he'd get the thing over and done with.

The first red grains ran back as he stretched out a hand toward the bared breast of the corpse. Those eyes! The light in them still. Surely—surely the dull fire couldn't strike that gleam in them? No, of course not. It was those infernal candles at the foot of the bed. Probably the wax contained some filthy ingredient that was affecting his eyes. Nothing his Uncle Mark had used was normal or natural. He was forever experimenting on his own senses and on other people's. The whole house ought to be burned down. Fire was the only purge for so much dangerous rubbish. That book in the library—everything suggestive, indecent. Yes, fire was the proper cure. He was so furious, so humiliated by the repugnant fear he felt of touching the corpse that he suddenly shouted at it:

"I'd like to burn the house down and you in it!"

Naturally there was no reply. Or was there? Didn't the dead man's grinning lips draw back a trifle further? Didn't the fixed eyeballs roll slightly in their sockets to meet his frantic angry gaze?

He cursed himself for a fool. A fool to have promised to carry out this fantastic post-mortem charade. A fool not to break his promise now. And fool most of all to get the wind up like this if he *was* going to do it.

He forced himself to take the parchment roll from under the dead man's hand.

He broke its black seal, unwound the tape, opened out the crackling sheet. His face darkened as he read the strong black lettering. This thing that seemed so childish and superstitious an hour ago began to assume a new aspect in its fulfilment. And for this, Stephen cursed his imagination now, rather than his lack of it in the first place.

Consulting the parchment from minute to minute he began to obey the directions written there.

"Take up the wafer that is in the mazar-bowl," he read. "Mazar? I suppose he means black-cherry wood."

Yes, there was the small wooden bowl on a table beside the bed. He took out of it a wafer whose smooth black surface was pricked in a deadly device he failed to understand. His fingers, colder than the dead flesh he touched, placed the wafer on the bared breast of the corpse.

Another, smaller bowl stood filled with water. And this also he put on the dead man's breast.

Then, turning to the table again, he dipped his trembling fingers into a handful of salt around which five minute black candles burned in a circle. Their tiny flames licked up fiercely as his hand was outstretched above them. Pain set his whole body on fire. He stood rigid, agonized. Suddenly the burning ceased. Only in his brain a strange sense of heat remained as if the fiery ordeal had left a spark upon the altar of his mind.

The salt he had taken up he now sprinkled upon the wafer and into the water. Once again he consulted the written words, put out an obedient hand, let it fall with a groan.

"No! No!" he muttered. "I don't like this business. It's—there's something I don't like about it! I believe he's—"

Against his will he looked up, caught the fixed dead eyes that seemed so piercingly to watch him, and again he felt a sense of utter powerlessness. Again, as when he first agreed to be his uncle's sin-eater, his resolution fatally relaxed. The fire in his brain dissolved the half-formed premonition of his danger.

Before the hard cold glitter in the dead man's eyes his own fell. He raised the bowl of water and held it out with stiffly extended arms toward the corpse. His hoarse strained voice came haltingly:

"I drink this water, with salt that can compel, that your sins may be washed from your soul. Let them flow—as this water—from you to me. I receive the great darkness of your sins. I give the light of my soul that your own may walk in it forever."

He shuddered violently as he turned, bowl in hand, to each of the four corners of the room, repeating the form of words each time. Then, putting the water to his lips he drained it and tossed the bowl away.

And now he knew no trick of candle or firelight had set that flame of wicked malice dancing in the eyes that held his own, or brought those capering shadows all about him. The fire within his brain worked like madness. He was part of all this now. He loved as much as loathed it. He desired as greatly as he feared to share the dead man's secret power.

He took up the wafer, turned again to each corner of the darkening room to repeat the written formula. Now his voice rose loud and defiant as he faced the corpse:

"Mark Zennor, with this bread and the salt that has power to seal my vow, I eat your sins. Give me the burden of them. I take their weight on my soul. I, your sin-eater, give my soul's rest for yours eternally."

He put the wafer in his mouth. It crumbled to salt dust on his tongue. As he swallowed it he was aware that the flame of life within him was rising higher—higher—higher. And, with its soaring, towering, leaping life, he seemed to touch the stars. Then, with awful downward plunge, he sank—swift—swooning—down to thunderous abysmal dark. . . .

"STEPHEN! Stephen!"

He roused himself. Rosaina was kneeling by his side where he lay on the floor. Her arms were about him. Her tears fell on his face. He got up, drawing her also to her feet, and looked down at her tragic face. He felt as though he'd been under the sea, submerged, almost drowned. His fears, his pain, the madness in his brain were washed away.

Rosaina held him with desperate convulsive pressure. He felt the wild beating of her heart against his breast. She couldn't speak. His low murmured words of love seemed to increase her dreadful shuddering agitation.

At last her sobbing breath was stilled, and she leaned against him in utter exhaustion as he stroked her golden shining hair.

"Darling! Dearest!" he whispered. "He's gone at last, left us free, you and me! You and me, my own! Rose! My golden lovely Rose! Love me, love me and forget the rest."

She didn't move or speak. Once she turned to kiss the fingers that rested on her hair, and the cold pressure of her lips startled him—her clasp, her kiss were so despairing. Then she cried out again:

"Stephen! Stephen! *Stephen!*"

"Darling! I am here—holding you—close—close. Why do you call as if I were leaving you?"

"Stephen! You are—you are leaving me!"

She pushed him away, stood with white tragic face and haunted eyes.

"Oh, Stephen, my dear!—my dear! Don't you understand at all what you have done?"

"You mean that barbaric little ceremony? Dearest, you simply can't believe there's anything in that! You might as well believe in ghosts and witches and devils—or—or anything," he finished lamely.

"I do believe in devils. He was a devil—served by devils. Didn't you see what held me bound this past hour, Stephen? Didn't you *see?*"

"The old man hypnotized you. I tried to wake you up—I tried repeatedly."

"You saw nothing—felt nothing when you touched me? Oh, it's come, it's come at last—our punishment for loving. How fast he's got you now! He'll drag you down to hell—down to hell."

She went close to him again, looked up into his frowning bewildered face.

"His sin-eater. *His sins.* Have you any idea what Mark's sins were? No! How could you—when even I—although I can't sleep for remembering, for remembering—even I can only guess at—"

Her face grew ashen but she moved back from his imploring arms.

"Wait, wait, Stephen darling! Oh, try to understand—try to believe me. It was real, that ceremony of the sin-eater. You *have* taken Mark's sins from him."

"You really believe that?" His tone was the more emphatic for a cold creeping doubt that chilled him now. "Darling, you can't be so medieval and superstitious as that!"

"I know, I know I'm right," she urged. "You're in hideous danger. Oh, if you believed me even now it might be possible to—"

She broke off, seized his hands and pressed them to her breast.

"Stephen! Stephen! Of course, I remember now what he said to me about Mark's illness, and that I must tell him if— Come quickly, quickly! We'll ask him to help you."

She clasped him in an agony of relief.

"Mr. Sant—don't you remember?—don't you remember he said Mark was not ill? He promised to return before any crisis arose if he could."

"No, I forget all about it. But he'd think me a fool to go to him with this tale.

"Uncle Mark was mad and you can be sure Sant knew it. He's the most celebrated alienist in Europe. Sant would count me as a patient if he thought I believed this. What can it signify—a few silly words gabbled over a dead body? Look here, Rosaina, let's get out of this room and talk somewhere else; even the sight of his corpse—"

She glanced over her shoulder as they went, hand in hand, to the door. Her loud cry seemed to the man to come from his own lips as he turned and stared also at the bed.

"Look! Look! Ah-h-h! Look at him now!"

He dropped her hand, strode to the cavernous bed. The face of the corpse was the face of one utterly at peace. Its bright staring eyes were closed, its lips gravely folded, every line that lust and pride had deeply stamped was smoothed away.

It was the face of one whose soul had found its rest.

Rosaina pressed close to Stephen. She stood staring . . . staring. . . . Her white trembling lips whispered over and over and over:

"You are his sin-eater—his sin-eater—his sin-eater You have taken the evil from him."

They turned to look at each other. Her eyes searched his in frantic love and agony, dreading to see in them what he had taken from the dead. He returned her look. Faint impatience pricked him. He'd had enough melodrama for one night, he felt. Rosaina was—what had his Uncle Mark once said of an Arab woman he'd bought in Touggourt? Oh, yes! "Zobeide, my dear nephew, was a—"

He pulled himself up. Good heavens!

What had brought that lewd story to his mind—and in connection with Rosaina? He turned in horrified contrition.

"Dearest, you must come away. This place reeks of him and his beastliness."

"OH, YES, please! Yes, we'll come at once. No, not here! I can't talk to you in *his* house."

Sant put down the telephone receiver, stood gazing at it. His mind was roused to extraordinary activity. His memory was gathering up facts, proofs, experience from the immense field of his knowledge. The whole situation was changed now.

The great tawny Persian cat, lying with head sunk between straightly extended forepaws, felt a break in the continuity of his peace. He looked up, gave a small inquiring trill of protest. His master picked him up and tucked the satin head beneath his own chin.

"Hároon Er-Rasheed, my old friend, it's

bad news—the worst possible news! Mark Zennor is dead."

He held the cat so that he might look into his benevolent peaceful face. The animal rubbed a cold friendly nose against his own.

"Oh, yes, I know I'm clever, my dear. But so is he, most infernally so, and if he's dead it's because he didn't wish to remain alive. For the moment I can't fathom his reasons—that is what we've got to discover."

Hároon Er-Rasheed burrowed his muzzle into the palm of Sant's hand and gurgled consolation.

"Well, I'm glad you believe in me so utterly. It all helps. But we must think—we must think."

With the gentle deliberation approved by that nervously constituted aristocrat he put the big cat down. Turning to his bookshelves he took out a battered volume entitled *The Human Will*. His visitors could not be here immediately, for his house was fairly inaccessible from Trink Village and the motor-road made a very long detour.

As this is the story of Zennor's death and of certain events immediately consequent on that crisis, it would be tedious to go back in any detail into circumstances of how and when these two men had previously come into conflict. The affairs were too elaborate, a great many other people were involved in them, and they had never been in the nature of man-to-man duels. Rather, Sant had interfered, very quietly, very circumspectly on a number of occasions in order to frustrate some of Zennor's ripest and most deadly plans.

By the time a rapid muffled knocking sounded at his front door, Sant had traveled a long journey in his thoughts. His immense power of concentration had marshaled his every encounter with Zennor and criticized each anew. In the light of his last dramatic move, everything Zennor had done or not done assumed less or more importance.

"Yes," reflected Sant aloud, as he rose to let in his visitors. "His death is a retreat in one sense, but it means that he has fallen back on some superior vantage-ground. My task is to discover what it is."

The welcoming light which, from the vestibule of his house, shone like a little star on the lonely hillside, showed Rosaina and Stephen to Sant as he opened his door to them.

Both were changed. He knew that instantly. It was a new and different quality of fear that now whitened the girl's face, aging and withering her inexpressibly. In Stephen's keen alertness there was now an edge of antagonism. At first faint pattern of the dead man's plan began to take shape in Sant's mind.

He led them in to his warm fire, and it did not surprise him to see his cat pressing up against the door as he opened it, but as the creature shot past his legs and away, ears flattened back, tail stiffened in angry fright, the pattern of Sant's thoughts was stamped a trifle more clearly. His eyes took on the gray remoteness of a winter sea, always a sign of intense mental preoccupation with him. He didn't, however, communicate his thoughts, but merely listened to their story and put extremely pertinent questions.

"About that one special book you recollected when Zennor had died and you were keeping vigil by him. It seems to me very important. I must get hold of that book you printed."

"I suppose it would be a good idea." Stephen felt a peculiar reluctance all of a sudden to part with that black-bound book. "I'll see if I can find it for you."

"Thanks. Tomorrow morning, then."

Stephen was astonished at his own stab of furious anger. He was an even-tempered man and, although he was roused at rare intervals, it took a great deal to make him angry. Also, when that happened, he always felt cold as a block of ice. Never in his life before had he experienced such fiery murderous hate as flared up in him now.

SANT pretended not to see the vivid, if very fleeting, change in the other's face.

A strong revulsion of feeling seized the younger man. "Yes," he begged, "do come and take the thing away. I can't bear to remember I printed it, helped to perpetuate such foulness. It's coming back to me as we talk what it was all about, at least so far as I understood it. When I was working on

it I was convinced Rosaina was somehow concerned—the human sacrifice—but there were a good many sacrifices mentioned, and she couldn't have been the same 'golden woman' who died in Persia thousands of years B. C., or a Libyan princess in the time of Alexander the Great, or a slave in A. D. 50! And yet the book—"

Sant's blank calm face effectually concealed his thoughts.

"Yes. Do go on," he encouraged; "this is all most relevant."

"Of course," confessed Stephen, "most of it was gibberish to me. Uncle Mark claimed to have been reincarnated over and over again. He had to find something—or someone to complete a Triad—a mystic perfect Triad. It had to be three who were bound each to the other in some mysterious way. Then he could offer his last sacrifice through the medium of the Triple Link. His great object seemed to be the possession of a Key—"

"The Key of Thoth?"

"Yes. That's what he was after—the Key of Thoth." He met Sant's grave eyes. "It's all pretty much of a jumble in my mind. I didn't understand one word in a hundred. But I do remember that he'd got to have some special sort of co-operation for his sacrifice."

"Stephen! What else—what else?"

Rosaina's voice was sharp with anxiety.

He looked at her rather vacantly, his brows drew together, he ruffled his thick brown hair. "It was fairly evident that he felt he'd got to the end of his search. There was a lot about his High Priest and the bond of blood to seal his bargain."

Sant's eyes were very cold, very remote. "I see." He looked intently at the other man.

"Damned if you do!" blazed Stephen suddenly. "It was my uncle's great secret, the goal of all he'd ever done or thought or lived for! No one—*no one* ever so much as guessed at his tremendous success—at the things he'd discovered."

"Stephen!"

Rosaina's cry brought him to himself. She shrank from his touch, turned to Sant with unmistakable appeal.

"He's worn out—as you are." Sant's voice was stern now. "You mustn't show fear, Rosaina, you mustn't feel fear! It will injure him. If your love has any depth and reality you've got to help him. You can't leave him now."

"Leave him?" stammered the girl.

"Certainly. You left him when you turned to me then. Now listen to me, both of you!"

He looked into Stephen's dark eyes. Anger made them glitter. His thin face seemed a trifle squarer, his lips a trifle fuller.

The rough dark hair took a red gleam from the firelight.

"Stephen," Sant put a hand on the other's twitching one, "you're afraid too and you're giving ground to the enemy. It's no use keeping up any sort of pretense about this; we must work together, it's our wills against—the dead!"

"His sin-eater. I am his sin-eater."

Stephen spoke, not in horror so much as in warning and reminder.

"You were ignorant and foolish. You let Zennor trick you once—are you going to let him go on doing it, Stephen Lynn?"

The other got hastily to his feet, held out his hand.

"No!—no! I'm not! No, I'm all right again now and I'll fight him until I die."

"And that won't do, either." Sant gripped him strongly. "You've got to live. You've got to find out how to free yourself."

He turned to Rosaina.

"I won't disturb my housekeeper so late—or so early! It's almost three o'clock in the morning. You shall have my room. There aren't any others ready. Stephen will do very well down here by the fire. I must go to Lamorna House at once."

He spoke with eyes on Stephen's face, saw gratitude and relief suddenly sharpen to suspicion.

Some sort of struggle was going on in the young man's mind. Sant went off with Rosaina, and returned to find Stephen in hat and coat.

"It might be better if I went back with you, after all. You can—" he hesitated. "Oh—if—of course, if you prefer—no, I'll come! You can keep an eye on me then."

His companion regarded him with absorbed attention.

"Don't you mean you want to keep an eye

on me?" he corrected. "Come if you will, by all means."

Again the younger man hesitated, then spoke in slow sulky tones.

"It would be better. The servants would think it queer if Rosaina and I were both here and you in possession at Lamorna House. Uncle Mark left like that!"

"Of course," Sant heartily concurred. "We'll go together."

THEY found Lamorna House abominably quiet—a challenging sinister quiet that met them on the threshold with all the force of swarming invisible assailants in possession of a stronghold. As they went through the hall and up the broad stairs, shadows seemed to peer and watch, to keep guard over the dead.

In the chamber of death they found the tall black candles still burning steadily at the foot of the bed. The head of the corpse lay deeply sunk into the pillows. On its face a yet profounder calm had settled. Sant looked down in silence. He hid his deep disquiet from Stephen, standing beside him; but, turning sharply, he surprised a strange smile dawning in the young man's dark eyes, a smile that spread as Sant watched it—loosening the fine curve of the mouth, aging and coarsening the eager face.

He faced the corpse and spoke a few rapid words under his breath. For a moment the look of infinite calm on Mark Zennor's face seemed to break and alter—as the surface of smooth water is ruffled by a sudden angry gust of wind.

But it was Stephen who answered Sant's words. What he said was unintelligible to himself—the words rushed from between his lips—his hands clenched—his whole body stiffened. Then, under the penetrating steady look with which Sant met his outburst he drew back. His taut muscles slackened. He looked almost stupidly bewildered.

"Sorry! Did you say anything? I felt dizzy all of a sudden."

"I didn't know you spoke Arabic!"

"Arabic!" echoed Stephen. "Why, I don't speak it—don't understand a word of it. What makes you say so?"

"Only that you cursed me very competently in that tongue just now."

Stephen's bewildered frown deepened to a scowl. "You seem as much off your balance as Rosaina. I've never spoken a word of Arabic in my life."

"Forgive me!" Sant put a hand on his arm. "I'm not playing tricks on you—it is *he* who is doing that. I wanted to prove something and I've done so. Come away. This empty shell he's left—everything here reeks of him—tainted—poisonous! Come, Stephen!"

Outside the room, Sant locked the door and pocketed the key. Instantly his companion's eyes blazed with fury, but it died down and faded at the older man's friendly smile and touch.

"Look here, Sant, I can't stand this, I'm all in a fog—can't seem to get a grip on myself. Can you give me something to make me sleep? If I could sleep, forget the last few hours, I might—"

"The very best thing," agreed the other.

THEY went downstairs again. In his own private study, Stephen switched on an electric radiator and produced drinks. An hour later he was sleeping heavily, stretched out in an easy-chair. Sant made for the library; he knew he must get hold of Mark Zennor's book before he was prevented.

He found it at last, sat down at a desk, and began to examine it. He read on and on. Dawn crept up to the tall, uncurtained windows. Warmth of the rising sun touched his cheek as he sat, fell on the printed page before him.

He got to his feet abruptly and flung up the nearest window, thrust out his head to breathe deeply of the keen salt air from the Atlantic. In the east a streak of yellow kindled behind glimmering ghostly bare trees. Ah! How good the sharp sweet air—the untainted dawn! How cleansing after the abominable pages of Zennor's book! He leaned against the window-frame, half closed his eyes, surrendered his tired mind and body to the spell.

A robin warned him. Young and bold and hungry, it fluttered to the broad sill on which his hand rested.

Cheep! Cheep! Cheep! *Cheep!*

Sant's eyelids lifted. He caught sight of a shadow on a side-pane of the bay window and turned in time to snatch up the open book. Stephen stood beside the

desk, a queer stiff automatic figure, his eyes wide open but glazed with sleep. As the book was withdrawn his lips drew back in a savage grimace and a blaze of vivid hate shone through the dreaming dark eyes. The hand outstretched to pick up the book drew back with crisping crooked fingers like the talons of a bird of prey.

Sant leaned forward, looking deep into the black fixed eyes of the sleepwalker.

"No, Mark Zennor—not yet! I stand between you and this man you have betrayed. I fight for Stephen Lynn—for his body and for his soul."

Again hate leaped like white fire in the fixed eyes, and for a moment the mask of Stephen's face quivered, altered, expanded to hideous semblance of the dead.

Sant drew closer, put all his will into repulsing the assault. "Not yet," he repeated. "You dare not take possession of this human body now. The four hands of Adda Nari still hold the four elements from your grasp. You are not yet wholly freed from the Wheel. The laws of human life still bind and limit you."

Fiery hate died on blankness in the eyes opposite his own. He blew lightly in the set young face.

"Wake, my dear boy—wake!"

Stephen was bewildered, annoyed, and very tired.

"What's it all about? Sleep-walking! Never done that before. Heavens! What a beastly draft!"

He slammed down the open window against the still twittering robin and rang a bell.

"Those lazy good-for-nothing servants! Snoring away upstairs. They can jolly well come down and do their bit. I'll have enough on my hands now with funeral arrangements and all the rest of it."

He looked far more exhausted than before he'd slept.

"What were you working at? That book of my uncle's—eugh! Better burn it—burn the whole library—everything!"

"Yes, I agree, but not until I've come to the end of the trail I'm following; not until I know how strong a link he made to bind you to him."

"That sin-eating charade?" Stephen's look was derisive. "Y'know we all got the wind up pretty badly last night. No man could believe in such mumb-jumbo—not now, in broad daylight. Last night was different. After watching Uncle Mark all those hours—and he was a—well, he's gone now, no need to dissect his unpleasant character more than necessary. Anyhow last night's over and done with! As to the rest—"

"You mean you no longer feel in any danger?"

"Danger? No, except of making a fool of myself. Last night he hypnotized Rosaina and I believe he put some sort of a 'come hither' on me too. Making the most of his last hours I suppose. I don't want to think of, or talk about, or remember last night any more."

"Perfectly natural and normal, but unfortunately your attitude gives Mark Zennor a clear field."

"What—with me!"

Stephen stared, then burst into a laugh. Sounds of steps in the hall interrupted him.

"One of the Seven Sleepers at last—butler probably," he went on. "Better go and tell him about Uncle Mark. He'll want to warn the maids and trot round pulling down blinds, etc. Servants adore deaths and funerals and all the gloom and wreaths and hushed voices and all the rest of it. There won't be tears, at least. No one in the wide world could regret Uncle Mark's death. There's the telephone, that'll be Rosaina—hope she slept better than I did, poor darling!"

IT WAS after the funeral that Sant missed Stephen.

"I can drive the car, of course," he told Rosaina as he tucked a rug about her knees. "But—"

She gave a shiver, nor was it the keen north-east wind that chilled her.

"We can't wait here in the churchyard for him. Let's go back.

A crackling log-fire and Sant's big yellow cat gave them welcome. Rosaina sank to a chair by the leaping flames and tossed her hat on the rug. She'd cast aside all the rich flaunting golds that Mark had insisted on, and in a dark tweed suit she looked less sophisticated and considerably more tired and fragile.

Hároon Er-Rasheed inspected her hat

with deep interest and a running commentary of sounds peculiar to himself, then leaped to her knee.

Sant smiled down on them both. "Not much of you visible now. I must see that Zennor's book is safe before looking for Stephen."

He crossed over to a bookcase and pulled out from behind a row of dusty folios a box clamped with silver, unlocked it with a key on a bunch in his pocket.

The box was empty!

"Gone! Stephen evidently made straight for it. It had a preface with elaborate detailed instructions for reaching the hidden entrance to a vault or crypt beneath Lamorna House—Zennor had converted it into a sort of chapel."

She stared up at him.

"The book! Instructions! D'you think Stephen's gone down to the horrible place?"

"Sure of it. He's been trying to do it ever since Zennor's death. I dogged him like his own shadow—he'd no chance until this afternoon. I saw him slip away from the graveside, but I couldn't run after him then.

"I've made a copy of those instructions." He put a hand into his breast-pocket and drew out a few thin crackling sheets from a case. "Impossible to find the place without this key. I'll have to follow at once."

"I must come too. Yes!—yes!" she got to her feet impetuously. "I can't wait here alone. You don't know what horrible thoughts I have."

"Believe me, I do know, but I ask you to stay. The danger is acute for all three of us, most of all for Stephen. For his sake I must go alone. I'm not powerful enough to give you protection if sudden attack came. If you hinder me or distract me and I fail—you and he are also lost, remember."

She met his eyes bravely.

"You're very clever, and very strong. I believe in you with all my heart. And I'll do my best to—to believe in myself too. But bring Stephen back to me! Oh, bring him back!"

"BRING Stephen back to me!" An hour later her passionate appeal echoed in Sant's ears as if Rosaina's strained white face still looked into his, while eyes and lips implored, "Oh, bring him back to me!"

On the threshold of a vast and vaulted chapel he stood cold and stiff as the carven monstrosities within it, his eyes fixed on a great altar that faced the entrance. Before the altar a man was standing—a man who elaborately genuflected and abased himself. The man was Stephen Lynn.

Sant, who knew the value and the meaning of each gesture, knew also that he was too late to interfere.

"It would kill him outright now," he murmured; "he's in trance. Zennor's taken complete control. He means to strike at once without giving me time to prepare. Yet the Universal Agent turns to its ebb! He's broken his Rule. He means to sacrifice before his Hour."

He took a few steps into the heavy perfumed gloom. What light there was beat down upon the altar-steps, above which a great metal globe hung, suspended in mid-air by magnetic force, a globe that received long shafts of light from concealed sources and gave them off again in dazzling hypnotic points of fire.

Sant carefully avoided raising his eyes. As carefully he moved forward, choosing his steps over the bizarre mosaic of the marble floor. He knew the deadly trap of the symbolic tree whose reversed branches spread under his feet. He knew what dark magic lent iridescent gleam to the peacocks set within their topaz circles. His lips murmured the Words and a Word as he trod between the stippled ochreous coils of two serpents intertwined. His hands moved in strange rapid gestures as he followed a narrow track of alternating black and yellow tiles, setting each foot on the black, advancing with a swaying balance of a tight-rope walker.

And now he halted. On the chapel pavement before him glowed a full moon, red, ominous as spilt blood. He anxiously examined it. If the moon revealed— Yes! So faint that only an initiate might discern its awful significance, an ovoid luminous shadow moved within the confines of its own circumference, vaporous, restless, potent, dread symbol—the Orphean Egg.

Sant waited, watched a curl of bluish mist rise from the full moon's strange

matrix, stood like a stone as it curled about his feet, his knees, his body, his stiffly erect head. Only with his will might he control this force—creator and destroyer before the earth was formed. Behind the dreadful veil that hung about him, his face showed the grimness of the ordeal. Vapor swirled and eddied swifter, denser every moment. Sant knew the pains of death, the pangs of rebirth, but he endured, and at last stood free.

Back to its living source the vapor sank as he moved forward to the lowest altar-step. He had received a baptism, and nothing in this place, dedicated to evil, might harm him in this hour.

He looked up instantly at the altar. The spare young figure knelt in rigid stillness now and every line expressed tense prodigious effort of concentration. A voice continuously rose and fell, but not Stephen's voice—the timbre was fuller and more richly modulated, a trained and powerful instrument whose deep notes held the sound of far-off stormy seas.

It was Mark Zennor's voice that rose and fell—rose and fell in magic compelling cadences! Zennor calling on his dark gods, reiterating his impious vows, drawing to his service a vast army of the damned.

Velvet-shod, Sant moved another step upward. And now he blotted out his own personality that it might make no impingement on the etheric waves of evil which the worshipper was drawing to himself. On all sides he felt strong pressure of occult power—subservient, dominated by the man at the altar above him.

"Bring him back to me!"

The words thrilled through his brain, for he could not obey them now. This man kneeling by the great Stone of Sacrifice was Stephen Lynn's human habitation merely. Within it, controlling, drilling an unaccustomed body to its ritual, was Mark Zennor's proud satanic brilliant mind.

"Bring Stephen back to me!"

Impossible now. Zennor had long ago too thoroughly prepared his ground, too completely trapped his victim from the first moment of their contact. He listened intently. The words rapped out firmer, quicker, more peremptory now. The climax approached.

The great chapel, circular in shape, had walls that rose curving, darkly luminous, satin-smooth as the petals of a vast black tulip, to meet a vaulted roof—their polished surface broken by squat archways behind which darkness lay like a crouching beast of prey.

Above the huge slab of the altar-stone was a reredos of red alabaster, a screen some thirty feet by ten. It was powerfully illumined from behind, so that its carving stood out in bold relief and a trick in the lighting gave a sinister effect of constant movement.

This screen was a vivid presentment of a human sacrifice. Bound on the stone-altar, a woman appeared to writhe and quiver. Her long bright hair rippled down to a deep trough about the altar-base. Into this same trough trickled a thin dark stream of blood from a knife which pierced the victim's body. About the altar stood tall candles whose flames danced in frenzy.

And behind the candles' flare and flicker, at each of the four corners of the altar, a veiled figure towered. Menacing, gigantic, these figures were the only immovable objects on the screen, and they achieved by their fateful stillness—in contrast with the surge and movement of all else in the picture—an effect of final inescapable doom. Dark crescent moons poised above each veiled head of these four attendant genii bearing Hebrew characters which read—EARTH. WINTER. NIGHT. DEATH.

And now Sant saw the black-clad figure—the body of Stephen Lynn, torn and wrenched, trembling from head to foot in diabolic ecstasy, arms flung wide, head bent backward so that light from the suspended globe beat full and fiercely down upon the upturned face. Louder—louder rang the great triumphant organ voice, pealing out into the unclean silence of the chapel's gloom, beating against the curved and shining walls which sent back clashing paeans of tremendous harmony—

"Thus I have conquered, ye Genii of the Twelve hours!
Thus are all things subdued to my Will!
By wisdom I have pierced Truth.
By intelligence I have cast down idols.
By strength I have bound Death in chains.
By patience I have fathomed the Infinite.

Now is the Universe wholly revealed to me.
Ye Terrible Ones! Princes of the kingdoms and heavens of Pharzuph, of Sialul, of Aeglun, of Aclahayr,
I, who have worshipped and obeyed, shall serve no more.
Princes of Earth, of Air, of Fire, of Water,
The Four Elements you rule are as dust under my heel.
I am invulnerable—beyond Death and change forever.
The six wings of Bereschott cover me.
The Rock of Yesod beneath my feet.
Bow down in homage! BOW DOWN!"

Sant, his eyes on the tense convulsed figure, saw it sway. Its outflung arms dropped.

The dark head leaned back—back until Sant could see its greenish pallor, and half-veiled eyes. Rigid, entranced, the spirit within him caught up into dark swooning ecstasy, Stephen fell back slowly, slowly into Sant's waiting arms.

"FRIDAY afternoon! A few more hours, Adrian—only a few hours now."

Sant glanced at Rosaina, got up from his chair and began to walk up and down his study. Presently he lighted a pipe, let it go out between his clenched teeth as he paced to and fro. He looked out across his garden where violets, anemones and jonquils braved February winds and tall daffodils danced to its piping. His absent gaze followed the course of a valley and rested at last on the stretch of ocean beyond. Gray, turbulent as his own thoughts, the Atlantic lay under a leaden sky. His brooding look dwelt on it as if in this vast element he found ease for his soul.

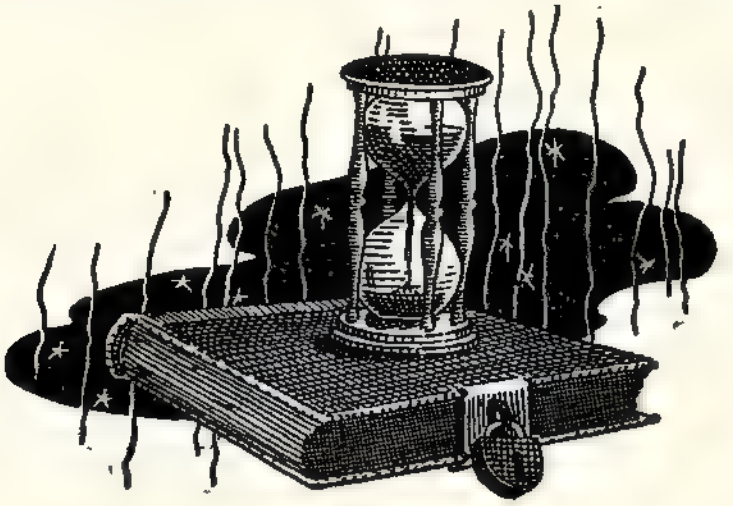
"Adrian!"

He turned back to Rosaina, sitting by the fire, his heart contracted with pity at sight of her. How altered since Zennor's death! Not all the tragic years of her marriage had broken her as these few days of torturing anxiety for the man she loved.

Sant's burden grew heavier as he met her eyes; she looked so lost, so wild, so grief-stricken; her body seemed transparent in the firelit dusk; her golden hair was lifeless and faded, the delicate lines of face and neck painfully evident, the amber eyes two deep pools of weariness. Body, mind and spirit could endure little more. And yet they *must!* And tonight. There could be no halt in the tremendous impetus of the occult rhythm of events. Zennor, through his chosen medium, Stephen Lynn, could not himself alter the impending climax now. Tonight he gained all, or lost all. There was no middle course.

He had challenged the Four Ancient Ones, and must prove their master or be forever enslaved. Tonight he must achieve the goal for which he had striven since his first incarnation on earth by offering the Perfect Sacrifice to complete the Triad of his protection.

Tonight! That much Zennor had revealed through Stephen on the day of the funeral while Sant watched in the chapel. And because it was tonight, Sant knew his enemy



feared him and his influence; for Zennor's own baneful star would not be at its zenith until the next moon's waning, in the Tenth Hour, called Malaen.

The genii of that Hour were strong and slaves to Zennor's will. They had been the heat of his blood, the shadow of his body, the breath of his nostrils when—in his first life on earth—he had, in shaggy beast-like form, run on all fours through forests of the north, forests dug up now as coal from under the crust of the world. Tonight these genii would serve him well. The Hour was favorable—but less favorable than the Tenth Hour, called Malaen. Zennor would have been stronger in the next moon's waning.

He went back to Rosaina, drew up a chair beside her. No hint of anxiety showed in the tranquil face he turned to her. He did not doubt her courage now, but he doubted whether the frail hold she had on life would carry her through the ordeal required of it. And she must live. *She must defeat Zennor on this plane while in the flesh.* Divorced from her body, he could not help her. Her ego and Stephen's too would be incorporated with Zennor's, made one with his damned soul.

She voiced his thoughts.

"I shouldn't have lasted another twenty-four hours. Another night. The night, oh God! Adrian!"

He bit hard on his pipe-stem and nodded.

"Even though you sat outside my door to keep watch, to prevent his coming to me, he sent his devils to torment me. Your drugs gave sleep to my body but my spirit suffered. In the shadows—in the silence I could see my body lying there, while I—myself—was forced to listen to what They said—what They said!"

"The main thing was that you slept. Your reason was saved in spite of all he could do."

He had never let her see how perilous he knew those dreams of hers to be. He only marveled at the strong beautiful balance of her mind that retained its sanity in spite of them.

A BUMP at the door heralded the sturdy old housekeeper with a tea-tray. She was the only servant Sant had permitted to stay on since the ceremony he had witnessed in the chapel. He refused to expose two younger maids to the danger of Stephen's presence in the house, or, rather, to the satanic malice of the mind now in possession of Stephen's body.

"I'll go myself to let Mr. Lynn know that tea is ready," he told the old servant.

Mrs. Poldhu nodded. She was a rather formidable old woman, afraid of no one and given to expressing her opinions very forcibly indeed. She'd summed up Stephen as "the spit of that old toad, his uncle Mark Zennor" and had flatly refused to speak or look at him.

"Plaze yourself, sir. 'Tesn't no consarn o' mine."

Sant left Rosaina setting out the tea-things. Hároon Er-Rasheed lay before the fire, bestowing passionate attention on one large paw which failed to meet his standards of cleanliness. Mrs. Poldhu waddled off to get more coal for the dying fire.

Sant searched the garden in vain. Satisfied that Stephen was no longer there, he hurried indoors again. He hadn't been in the least concerned about the tea question but had seen, from the window, that Stephen was warily approaching a gate on which a blackbird sang in the dusk. Sant didn't wish a repetition of a savage little incident he and Rosaina had witnessed yesterday when Stephen had revoltingly injured a dog that had snarled at him.

That was his voice! Sant hurried. The door of the study, where he'd left Rosaina, was open.

"Stand still, little fool!"

The words rang out.

"This is to punish you for locking me out at night. Now, you yellow beast—*jump!*"

Sant leaped to the door and was in time to see Hároon Er-Rasheed between Stephen's hands, his belly flattened to the ground, ears back, golden eyes black with terror. At the word "jump!" the animal shot forward as if from a gun.

Rosaina stood, white, agonized unable to stir a muscle. Her shriek and Stephen's laugh synchronized with Sant's lightning dash. He caught up the yellow cat from the fire on which it crouched, its eyes glazed and fixed on Stephen's face.

The animal stubbornly reisisted Sant. It

fought to free itself, struggled furiously to obey the will of the mocking devil in Stephen's eyes. Sant held it in iron hands, and faced its tormentor.

"Mark Zennor!" his voice was barely a whisper. "You exceed your powers. Release this animal—I lay my command on you!"

In Stephen's eyes such cold blind hatred flared that Rosaina cried out again. But Sant moved nearer to his enemy, stared him between the eyes—stared until the dark fire in them was quenched, until their lids drooped. In sullen obedience his hand brushed the big cat's head. He muttered a low-breathed word.

The Persian jumped half the width of the room, halted to turn eyes of blazing yellow fire on Stephen, dashed like a crazy thing through an open window, flashed across a lawn, up over a wall, and away. Stephen also vanished from Rosaina's sight.

He went slowly, but his exit was even more spectacular than that of the unfortunate beast. Again she cried out in stark terror, for he disappeared without moving at all.

"He is here with us, Rosaina. He is perfectly visible to me. But you are, in part, subject to him. He has intoxicated your vision by a trick. *Will* yourself to see him—here, take my hand."

A touch of it, and she regained control. She saw Stephen walking toward the door.

SANT looked after him as he went from the room.

"He lost control too. I've tried for that revelation from the start. Oh, it was an infinitesimal moment of anger merely, but enough—enough to work on. He's at a disadvantage in his borrowed flesh."

Rosaina trembled, but with anger now, rather than fear.

"Adrian! Your poor cat—won't you go and look for him?"

Her indignation burned so fiercely that she couldn't fathom his apparent indifference. He gave her a long keen look.

"You are very angry. Good! It will stimulate you. But don't worry about Hároon. Mercifully he wasn't injured; the fire was almost out and his fur's thick. He'll forget when—when we've saved Stephen."

She was goaded to new activity. The shock of the beautiful friendly beast's punishment, remembrance of his glazed eyes fixed on Stephen's grinning face, and his shining yellow fur with gray smoke curling up about his body, stung her to fierce anger and revolt.

"You're right. He shall not take Stephen from me—he shall not! I'll fight, I'll fight to the end now. That poor cat's eyes—Stephen shall never . . . oh! I'm ready, Adrian! That devil shall not win!"

He knew her present condition could not last, but it all helped. Anger would die down, her mood of hot reckless indignation cool. Only staying-power counted. But this would strengthen her will. Everything turned finally on that.

"There's work for both of us to do before midnight. And I want to emphasize once more that it's very important you should go of your own free will tonight. I must remain here, working for you, helping to strengthen your will with my own. But it is Zennor's chosen Hour and I may not interfere with what he does. Don't evade Stephen. Offer yourself a free victim for the sacrifice. And concentrate ceaselessly, on your purpose to save Stephen."

"Yes! Yes!" she whispered, "I must hold him! Save him!"

"Hold him, save him," emphasized her companion. "And now there's no time to

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lose. You've got those books and papers? Good. Concentrate for your life—and his. No need to lock ourselves in tonight. Stephen will be at Lamorna House—until he comes for you."

He was at once absorbed, drawing strange symbols on ancient brittle papyri where faint tracery of lettering showed. After examining these faint marks through a glass for minutes at a time, he repeated them aloud. At the last word—all he said being perfectly unintelligible to the girl—he would scratch a new sign on the papyrus under his hand with an alder twig which he kept charred at a naked flame on his desk.

He'd been at this for two days and two nights, slaving like a man possessed, muttering, writing, glaring at the dirty old papyri, transported to a world Rosaina couldn't conceive of.

She recollected the yellow Persian's queer interest in these literary labors, how he'd leaped up at the faint rustle of twig on paper when a new symbol had been drawn, how his eyes, their pupils distended to the edge of the iris, had followed the movements of some invisible moving thing about Sant's chair.

Poor beautiful Hároon! She bent to her task with tightened lips.

BY SLOW degrees she became aware of her surroundings. When first Stephen led her to a throne-like seat, she could make out nothing in the pungent dusk. Now the great chapel was revealing itself; and, instructed by Adrian though she was, her heart stood still at the revelation.

Her throne was in the exact center of the great circular floor. Behind it, and on either side, curved the shining walls.

Before her stood the altar with its reredos which, from this distance, she saw only as a burning patch of light.

She scarcely glanced at the great dazzling globe of metal in midair, so afraid was she of its will-benumbing magic. She fixed her gaze, rather, on the man who moved to and fro before the altar in its refracted rays—going about his awful business.

Her chill, slender hands clasped the snakes' heads of polished ebony that formed two arms for her seat. The elaborate ritual that was to culminate in her death was begun. She recalled Adrian, shut up in his study, bent over his desk, concentrating on her, sending out his strong will to aid her own. Strengthened, steadied, she then deliberately thrust aside this mental image and gave her whole attention to Stephen and his profane and terrifying preparations.

Mark's sin-eater—Mark himself now, save for the thin veil of flesh that masked his hell-born vicious soul. It was Stephen's straight strong body there, kneeling at the altar. It was his dear hands, his dark head, his face and eyes and lips. Oh! it was everything—and it was nothing. The mad cruel smile, the eyes' wild glare, the towering merciless pride that blazed behind this fleshly screen were Mark's alone.

Mark's sin-eater. And how deep was

every sin of the dead printed upon this face and body of Stephen Lynn! The voice that rang in deep imperious rhythm was altogether Mark's. Stephen's had been notably clear, eager, flexible, with a trick of rising inflection that she adored.

Ah! This was Mark! That he moved and spoke in Stephen's guise made him more awfully Mark Zennor. Not a glimpse of the real Stephen. Not a spark of his own ego burned in the temple of his body; its altar light was quenched and Mark's dark soul was in possession.

Rosaina's courage wavered. Suppose Adrian was wrong? Suppose Stephen could not, after all, return to his habitation of the flesh for the promised moment? Suppose she failed to recognize the moment if it came? What had Adrian said?

"Stephen will come. He *must* come. Zennor may not offer sacrifice without first allowing Stephen to return momentarily to his own body once more. Beyond all question you will see him again in the flesh."

Fear drove hope away, rode her leaping thoughts.

"He is not here—the man I love is not here. This is a devil, a monster, it is Mark. He has tricked Stephen, destroyed him, thrust him down to hell—his eyes—Stephen's kind gentle eyes—that cat, how his eyes were held by Mark's! . . . Stephen's too, he must obey, torture himself, he is a slave—a slave like that animal! Stephen! But there *is* no Stephen—he has no body, no soul, he doesn't exist! Stephen!"

But love still struggled to believe.

"I must wait. One moment there will be, one brief moment! I shall meet him face to face in the living flesh. My dear! My beloved! And I will hold him fast—fast for ever. No one shall take him from me. He will come and I will hold him fast—fast—"

And now the chapel lights grew dim. The suspended dazzling globe of metal dulled to a pale moonglow. Black candles, tall watchful guardians about the altar-stone, bowed trembling heads of flame, bowed down to their sockets, wavered—died. Only the reredos still blazed, its restless secret fire more brilliant, more incandescent as globe and candles failed.

Stephen turned from the altar, advanced with stately purposeful deliberation, down the five steps, across the chapel floor. Now he stood before Rosaina and in his brilliant eyes she saw Mark's demon enthroned, triumphant.

"Come!" he commanded. "I am ready. You are chosen to share this Hour with me."

She felt his fingers close upon her own; their heat burned her, their cruel strength appalled. This was Mark, all Mark indeed. How well she knew that fierce hold, how her nerves shrank at its familiar possessiveness!

He led her to a thin, blood-red crescent of moon that gleamed in its first quarter on the marble floor. Vast eagles' wings outstretched in fiery lines behind the wicked knife-edge of the moon.

"Stand here."

Obediently she placed her feet upon the sign. She felt its poignant blade's sharp agony. The High Priest, hands of iron on her shoulders, faced her with rapt cruel face down-bent.

"Receive her, oh Prince and Ruler of the Air! This is the victim appointed to fulfil my Destiny. Before Time began I chose her from all the worlds that are. Her blood shall seal my vow."

She felt the beat of great wings; the air about her vibrated and fanned her coldly on the cheek, cold as the breath from mountain heights, cold to the heart it struck—but the High Priest's face of triumph chilled her very soul.

He led her to the east, where a half-moon showed—a fountain of living water rising beside it. Here again he dedicated her, calling on all the waters of the earth to witness his power.

By the three-quarter moon dark earth was strewn, and, standing here, she knew the smothering darkness of the grave. Only the unrelenting hand that guided her, the deep voice that pealed in trumpet-call, summoned her again from what seemed her tomb.

And now he set her feet upon the last ominous moon in whose full orb moved that potent deadly cloud—soul of all that is—ageless—indestructible—accursed.

A brazier of fire stood close by. The High Priest drew a tiny phial from the folds of his robe, shook its powdered con-

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tents on the red coals. Flame leaped in a twisting clear blue pillar to the roof, spread across it, streamed down the walls again.

The High Priest's voice rolled in thrilling music above the elements' fierce roar:

"Rulers of Fire—above the earth, within the earth, about the earth!

Michael! Samuel! Anael! Hear me now! The appointed Hour is come! The Victim is prepared

Receive my Sacrifice! Receive my Sacrifice! Receive my Sacrifice!"

As the third loud cry rang echoing round the chapel's flaming walls, one single spear of glittering white fire thrust upward from the cradle of its being—from the deadly ovoid cloud within the full red moon. The priest's hand closed swiftly about the fire-spear, bent it to brush Rosaina's forehead, released it with a muttered word. Instantly the spear vanished and all the fiery walls and roof grew dark once more.

Down to his knees sank the High Priest. His lips touched the red moon's rim. Three times he did obeisance, three times he murmured words of power. Then he rose and faced the victim.

Rosaina, at touch of the shining spear, felt deadly mortal chill invade her body—a sense of doom paralyzed every faculty.

It was too late to struggle, too late to fight! Stephen was lost! And she must die! She must let go—let go—let go. . . .

She stood watching the High Priest as he moved from her, up the five steps, up to the altar. He reached it, turned to face her, lifted his arms until his black silken cloak stretched like wings on either side of a scarlet sheath-like robe. Higher leaped the hellish lights behind the reredos. Before its strong pulsating evil, Stephen loomed dark and tall and terrible. He waited for her. He summoned her. She must obey—obey him.

From the caves of darkness that lined the walls between its broad squat pillars, shadows thrust and crowded, worshippers from hell, incorporeal, soundless, shapeless, fluid as water, bodiless as smoke, yet, beyond all words, instinct with power.

The High Priest's congregation was assembled. Rosaina the Victim was summoned. Cold and darkness below, above,

on every side. She moved to the altar like driftwood borne on the ocean tide.

Now she was at the altar steps. Each one's ascent set her a world's width farther off from Stephen. Now she stood in the balefire glow of the altar-screen. The High Priest's hands lifted her, laid her on the altar-stone.

At last she saw the figures on the gleaming quivering reredos, saw herself in the bound victim there, saw Stephen in the High Priest who stood beside the sacrificial stone. And behind the veils of the Four about the altar, she recognized the lewd companions of her dream.

A swift pang of longing tore her for Adrian's help. How sure he had been! How utterly she had believed that Stephen—Stephen himself—would return if only for an instant. Now, turning to the wickedly intent face bent over her she saw Mark, and Mark alone.

Stephen was lost—forever lost. And she must die and go out in the darkness too.

Thin biting cords were bound about her. A knife-blade winked and flashed. Now indeed the end was come. Her eyes stared up into the face bent over hers.

Sudden rending pain stung her failing senses. A veil seemed snatched from before her eyes. Her heart's slow beat quickened to furious pulsing life. Nerve and muscle strained to break the bonds that held her.

"Stephen! Stephen! Stephen!"

Her voice rang through the gloom. The black smooth walls seemed to quiver in response. All the hurtling swarming shadows jostled closer.

"Stephen! Stephen!"

Again the dark walls trembled. Closer pressed the demon shadows.

"Stephen! Come to me! Come to me!"

The High Priest's face bent lower. Dark eyes looked into her own. A faint urgent whisper reached her ears.

"I have come . . . from hell . . . to you. Hold me! Save me!"

"Stephen!" she cried again. "Ah, this is you indeed! Your eyes that look at me. Stephen! I will hold you. I will save you. Keep your eyes on mine. I will never, never let you go!"

And now she died a thousand deaths. Delusion hurled her from world to world

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through awful space. Fire burned her flesh from her charred bones. Water drowned her beneath dark mountainous waves. Heavy earth buried her in earthquake shocks. But in flame and rushing water, under the earth or above it in the illimitable aching kingdoms of the air, she saw one thing clearly. She saw the face of Stephen Lynn. Nothing—nothing else.

Fighting, struggling, holding the gates of her will fast locked against Mark's vicious power, she felt a hand in hers. It was Adrian's strong clasp. Adrian's voice spoke across the roar of fire and tumult of water, of crashing rocks and howling winds.

"The Hour is about to strike. Hold fast, hold fast!"

Stephen's face grew clearer. Its look altered. He was smiling down at her. She could feel his warm breath. His strong gentle hands released her from her bonds. His voice spoke, assuring her of safety. His arms enfolded her as she sank, faint with rapture . . . the world about her fading. . . .

"BUT Adrian! You did come to me!" she protested. "I saw you, heard you, felt your hand in mine."

"Probably. All of me that really *is* me. But my body didn't move from this room, this table, this chair you see before you."

Rosaina looked round the room. Sun streamed in from open windows. A blackbird's exquisite liquid song opened the very gates of heaven to its listeners. She turned to Stephen once more.

He put out a hand to touch her own.

"Yes! Still here, darling."

"I can't—I can't believe it. The three of us together at last—safe—happy—free!"

"And Mark—" she shuddered. "Tell me, Adrian, I want to know before we forget him—utterly. What happened—what does our freedom mean—to *him?*"

Sant put out a quick warning hand. His answer came muffled, almost a whisper:

"Forget, forget, Rosaina! His dark soul is in bondage. It is not safe, even in thought, to follow him now."

Stephen's arm drew her to him. His eyes adored her.

"Rose, golden Rose! Remember only that we are happy—free—at last."

The Eyrie

(*Continued from page 6*)

Seabury Quinn Speaks

The Editor, WEIRD TALES
9 Rockefeller Plaza, New York 20, N. Y.

Here's fame, or something—

You may remember having forwarded a letter from a gentleman in Kochi, Japan, to me some time ago, relative to his use of my story Dark o' the Moon (W. T. Nov. '49) in a book of representative modern American short stories for use by Japanese students of English. Well, Prof. Austin and I have made a deal, and he has written me that he's thus introducing my contribution to the education of the Japanese Schoolboy:

"The serpent woman and her human lover are familiar figures in the folklore of many nations. Usually she is a creature of horror, but readers familiar with English literature will remember her as a sympathetic, even pathetic, being in Keats' *Lamia*. In the following tale, however, the serpent woman is shown in her traditional garb of loathsomeness and terror. Mr. Quinn's story has all of Edgar Allan Poe's sombre coloring together with a modern American realism which enhances the suspense and horror."

Whew!

Seabury Quinn
Washington, D. C.

The Editor, WEIRD TALES
9 Rockefeller Plaza, New York 20, N. Y.

You asked, at the end of my letter published in the latest issue (July) of WEIRD TALES, *just what the exception was to my high praise of the May issue. I'll tell you. Did you see the backstrip of the magazine? It was green. GREEN!*

Now, I like WEIRD TALES. *I think* WEIRD TALES' *greatest period was from about 1928 to 1939. I have most of the issues during that period. They all have red backstrips. Red is the traditional color of* WEIRD TALES. Red *is* WEIRD TALES. *Do you remember the fuss a lot of readers made way back in the thirties when the words "the unique magazine" were removed from under the title? Well, red is even more traditional. Consider*

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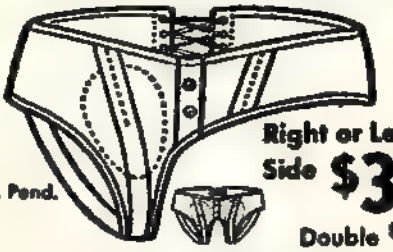

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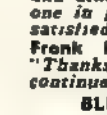

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the appearance of my book shelf: WEIRD TALES *in a long row running from January 1928 to July 1952, all the same in appearance, except for the next-to-the-last one which has a green back. It is frustrating. That's what.*

Dave Hammond
Runnemede, N. J.

We hope our engraver's face is as red as he vows to keep WEIRD TALES' backstrip in future. The mistake was his, and we were just as concerned as reader Hammond—Editor, WEIRD TALES.

That Fantastic Day

FREDERICK SANDERS wrote us a few paragraphs concerning his story in this issue—his second in WEIRD TALES—and we pass them on as an interesting sidelight on "One Fantastic Day":

"In my story Rob was the psychic one of the two friends; Peter was of the earth earthy. This contrast I tried to bring out all through the tale. It is Rob who mentally feels *the atmosphere of the returned past. The curse concerned the iron bar, and one man died by it. Rob did not know that Peter, his friend, was dead; his brain had ceased to function. Rob was the greater victim of the curse, for he was spared to die later by the hangman's noose for a crime he did not commit. That ended the curse, for two men who 'found or touched' the iron bar had died to fulfill it.*

"For one day the Red Horse Inn and its landlord and wife existed in the present. When the cuckoo clock called midnight the past returned into the past, leaving one dead man and one live man with his mental powers gone in the reality of the present. Rob's reason returned after a blacked-out period and everyday reality took charge of him in the shape of the Law."

Frederick Sanders,
Chatham, England.

The Editor, WEIRD TALES
9 Rockefeller Plaza, New York 20, N. Y.

I've just read the July, '52 W. T. *and, with one exception, both the illustrations and the text meet with my full approval. The single story that I found objectionable was*

Mr. Harry Botsford's "Elmer Bittersnitt and the Three Bears."

Now, I'll admit that Mr. Botsford's narrative was not a bad one as far as style is concerned (though I'm not too fond of colloquial writing styles). I was offended, however, by the author's innuendos concerning the moral characters of the three bears.

This insulting name-calling must stop! I don't mind it if you attack werewolves, vampires, feline familiars, succubi, incubi, &c., &c., for, goodness knows, those creatures are malicious, but, please, stop picking on bears.

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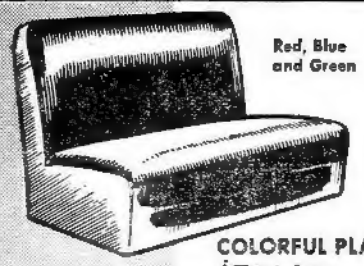

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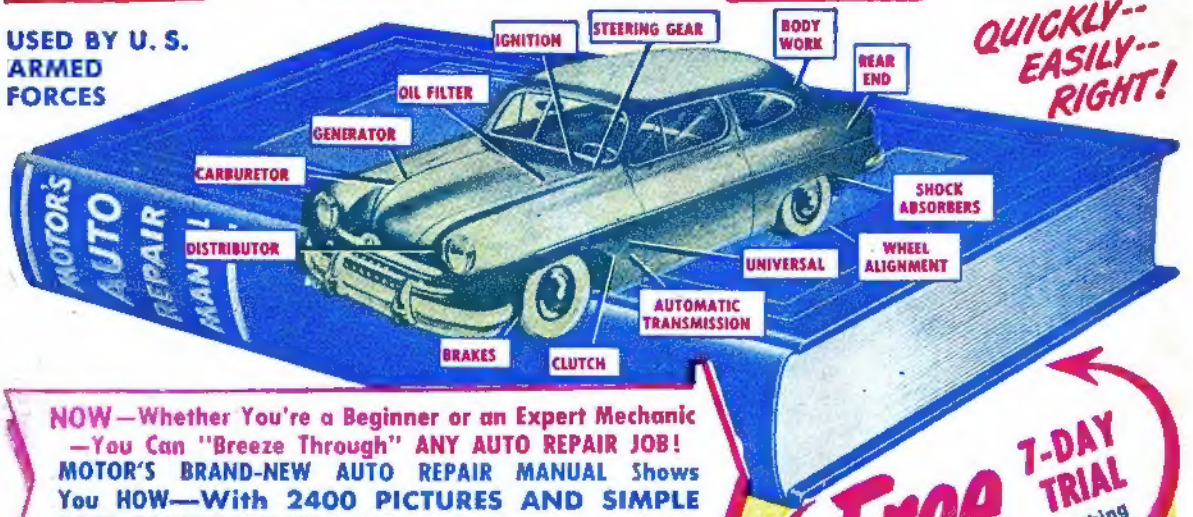

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